BRITTANY

BY

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TEXT·BY·DOROTHY

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MARIE JEANNE

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MORTIMER MENPES
TEXT BY DOROTHY
MENPES · PUBLISHED
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DOUARNÉNEZ

BRITTANY

CHAPTER I

DOUARNÉNEZ

The gray and somewhat uninteresting village of Douarnénez undergoes a change when the fishing-boats come home. Even with your eyes shut, you would soon know of the advent of the fishermen by the downward clatter of myriads of sabots through the badly-paved steep streets, gathering in volume and rapidity with each succeeding minute. The village has been thoroughly wakened up. Douarnénez is the headquarters of the sardine fishery, and the home-coming of the sardine boats is a matter of no little importance. The 9,000 inhabitants of the place are all given up to this industry. Prosperity, or adversity, depends upon the faithfulness, or the fickleness, of the little silver fish in visiting their shores. Not long ago the sardines forsook Douarnénez, and great was the desolation

and despair which settled upon the people. However, the season this year is good, and the people are prosperous.

As one descends the tortuous street leading to the sea, when the tide is in, everything and everyone you encounter seem to be in one way or another connected with sardines. The white-faced houses are festooned and hung with fine filmy fishing-nets of a pale cornflower hue, edged with rows of deep russet-brown corks. Occasionally they are stretched from house to house across the street, and one passes beneath triumphal arches of really glorious gray-blue fishing-nets. This same little street, which barely an hour ago was practically empty and deserted, now swarms with big bronzed fishermen coming up straight from the sea, laden with their dripping cargo of round brown baskets half filled with glistening fish. They live differently from the sleepy villagers—these strapping giants of the sea, with their deep-toned faces, their hair made tawny by exposure, their blue eyes, which somehow or other seem so very blue against the dark red-brown of their complexion, their reckless, rollicking, yet graceful, sailor's gait. A sailor always reminds me of a cat amongst a roomful of crockery: he looks as if he will knock

HOMEWARD BOUND

over something or trip over something every moment as he swings along in his careless fashion; yet he never does.

What a contrast they are, these stalwart fishers of the deep, to the somewhat pallid, dapper-looking, half-French hotel and shop keepers, who are the only men to be seen in the village during the day-time—these fishermen, with their russet-brown clothing faded by the salt air into indescribably rich wallflower tones of gold and orange and red! What pranks Mistress Sea plays with the simple homespun garments of these men, staining and bleaching them into glorious and unheard-of combinations of colour, such as would give a clever London or Parisian dressmaker inspiration for a dozen gowns, which, if properly adapted, would take the whole of the fashionable world by storm! You see blue woollen jerseys faded into greens and yellows, red *bérets* wondrously shaded in tones of vermilion and salmon. From almost every window tarpaulin and yellow oilskin trousers hang drying; every woman in the place is busily employed.

Many a fascinating glimpse one catches at the doorways when passing, subjects worthy of Peter de Hooch—a young girl in the white-winged cap

and red crossway shawl of Douarnénez cutting up squares of cork against the rich dark background of her home, in which glistening brass, polished oak, blue-and-white china, and a redly burning fire can be faintly discerned. A soft buzzing noise, as of many people singing, occasionally broken by a shrill treble, and a group of loafing men, peering in at a doorway, attract your attention. You gaze inquisitively within. It is a large shed or barn filled with hundreds of young girls and women, with bare feet and skirts tucked up to their knees, salting and sifting and drying and cooking sardines, singing together the while as with one voice some Breton folk-song in a minor key, as they busy themselves about their work.

It is impossible to describe one's feelings when, after descending the steep cobbled street, one first catches sight of the sea at Douarnénez. One can only stand stock-still for a moment and draw in a deep breath of astonishment and fulfilment of hopes.

Before you lies a broad expanse of gray-blue. I can liken it to nothing but the hue of faded cornflowers. Whether it is the time of day or not I cannot tell, but sea and sky alike are flooded with this same strange cornflower hue; the hills in the distance are of a deeper cornflower;

GRANDMÈRE

and clustered about the quay are many fishing-barques, showing purply-black against the blue delicacy of the background.

Over the gray-blue sea are scudding myriads of brown, double-winged boats, all making for the little harbour—some in twos, some in threes, others in flocks, like so many swallows. Close to the dark cornflower hills is a patch of brilliant verdant green —so yellow-green that it almost sets your teeth on edge.

Set down in mere words, this description can convey no impression of the Bay of Douarnénez as I saw it that balmy autumn afternoon. My pen is clogged ; it refuses to interpret my thoughts. It was a scene that I shall never forget. As the fishing-boats neared the shore the gorgeously flaming brown-and-gold and vermilion sails were hauled down, and in their places appeared the filmy gray-blue nets hung with rows of brown corks. The rapidity with which these brown-sailed work-aday boats changed to gossamer, cornflower-decked, fairy-like crafts was extraordinary. It was as if a flight of moths had by the stroke of a fairy's wand been suddenly transformed to blue-winged butterflies. In and about their boats the sailors are working, busy with their day's haul,

picturesque figures standing against the luminous blue in their sea-toned garments.

On the quay the women are standing in groups, talking and knitting, and keeping a sharp look-out for their own particular 'men.' Trim, neat little figures these women, with their short dark-blue or red skirts, their gaily-coloured shawls drawn down to a peak at the back, their light-yellow sabots and their tightly-fitting lace caps, made to show the brilliant black hair beneath and the pretty rounded shape of their heads. Many a time when the corn-flower-blue sea has turned to sullen black, and the balmy air is alive with flying foam and roaring winds, such women must wait in vain on the quay at Douarnénez for their men-folk.

The sailor's life is a hard one in Brittany, exposed as he is in his small boat to the fearful storms of the Atlantic. But danger and trouble are far distant on this balmy autumn afternoon: the haul has been an exceptional one, the little fishing-craft are filled high with silver fish, fishermen fill the streets with laden baskets, and the soft murmur of many women's voices singing at their work is wafted through the open doorways of the sorting and counting-houses. Every moment the boats on the horizon become more and more numerous, the men

being anxious to land their cargo before nightfall; the sea, in fact, is dark with little brown craft racing in as if for a wager. At one point the fleet splits up, and the greater portion enter an inlet other than that at which we are standing.

Anxious to watch their incoming, we hurry round the cliffs, past quiet bays. The black rocks against the blue sea, allspice-coloured sand, and overhanging autumn-tinted trees almost reaching to the water's edge, would afford many a fascinating subject for the painter of seascapes. In descending a hill, the haven towards which the fishing-boats are scudding is before us—a large bay with a break-water. On the near side of it are massed rows upon rows of fishing-boats, now arrayed in their gossamer robes of blue. Everyone is busy. You are reminded of a scene in a play—a comic opera at the Gaiety. Boats are entering by the dozen every moment, and arranging themselves in rows in the little harbour, like a pack of orderly school-children, shuffling and fidgeting for a moment in their places before dropping anchor and remaining stationary. Others are scudding rapidly over the smooth blue sea, ruffling it up in white foam at their bows. Scores of men in rich brown wallflower-hued clothes and dark-blue *bérets* are as busy as

bees among the sails and cordage; others are walking rapidly to and fro, with round brown baskets, full of silver fish, slung over the arms. But before even the sardines are unloaded the nets are taken down, bundles of blue net and brown corks, and promptly carried off home to be dried. This is the sailors' first consideration, for on the frail blue nets depends prosperity or poverty. Such nets are most expensive: only one set can be bought in a man's lifetime, and even then they must be paid for in instalments.

Above the quay, leaning over the stone parapet, are scores of girls, come from their homes just as they were, some with their work and some with their *goûté* (bread and chocolate or an apple). They have come to watch the entrance of the fishing fleet: comely, fresh-complexioned women, in shawls and aprons of every colour—some blue, some maroon, some checked—all with spotless white caps. The wives are distinguished from the maids by the material of which their caps are made: the wives' are of book-muslin and the maids' of fillet lace. Some have brought their knitting, and work away busily, their hair stuck full of bright steel knitting-needles. I was standing in what seemed to be a "boulevard des jeunes filles." They were

MEDITATION

mostly quite young girls; and handsome creatures they were too, all leaning over the parapet and smiling down upon the men as they toiled up the slope with their baskets full, and ran down again at a jog-trot with the empties. The stalwart young men of the village were too much preoccupied to find time for tender or friendly glances: it was only later, when the bustle had subsided somewhat, and the coming and going was not so active, that they condescended to pay any attention to the fair.

The matrons were mostly engaged in haggling for cheap fish. The men, tired after their day's work, generally gave way without much ado. It was amusing to watch the triumph in which the old ladies carried off their fish, washed and cleaned them in the sea, threaded them on cords, and, slinging them on their shoulders, set off for home.

It seemed as if the busy scene would never end. Always fresh boats were arriving, and still the horizon was black with fishing craft. Reluctantly we left the scene—a forest of masts against the evening sky, a jumble of blues and browns, rich wallflower shades and palest cornflower, brown corks, and the white caps of the women.

Next morning the romantic and picturesque

aspect of the town had disappeared. Gone were the fishermen, and gone their dainty craft. The only men remaining were loafers and good-for-nothings, besides the tradesmen and inn-keepers. Two by two the children were tramping through the steep gray streets on their way to school—small dirty-faced cherubs, under tangled mops of fair hair (one sees the loveliest red-gold and yellow-gold hair in Douarnénez), busily munching their breakfasts of bread and apples, many of them just able to toddle. 'Donne la main a ta sœur, George,' I heard a shrill voice exclaim from a doorway to two little creatures in blue-checked pinafores wending their weary way schoolwards. Who would have known that one of them was a boy? They seemed exactly alike. Handsome young girls in neat short skirts, pink worsted stockings, and yellow sabots, were busy sweeping out the gutters. Little children's dresses and pinafores had taken the place of nets and seamen's oilskins, now hanging from the windows to be dried. The quay was silent and desolate; the harbour empty of boats, save for a few battered hulks. All the colour and romance had gone out to sea with the fishermen. Only the smell of the sardines had been left behind.

MINDING THE BABIES

ROCHEFORT-EN-TERRE

A COTTAGE IN ROCHEFORT-EN-TERRE

CHAPTER II

ROCHEFORT-EN-TERRE

During our month's tour in Brittany we had not met one English or American traveller; but at Rochefort-en-Terre there was said to be a colony of artists. On arriving at the little railway-station, we found that the only conveyance available was a diligence which would not start until the next train, an hour thence, had come in. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to sit in the stuffy little diligence or to pace up and down the broad country road in the moonlight. There is something strangely weird and eerie about arriving at a place, the very name of which is unfamiliar, by moonlight.

After a long hour's wait, the diligence, with its full complement of passengers, a party of young girls returned from a day's shopping in a neighbouring town, started. It was a long, cold drive, and the air seemed to be growing clearer and sharper as we ascended. At length Rochefort-en-

Terre was reached, and, after paying the modest sum of fifty centimes for the two of us, we were set down at the door of the hotel. We were greeted with great kindness and hospitality by two maiden ladies in the costume of the country, joint proprietors of the hotel, who made us exceedingly comfortable. To our surprise, we discovered that the colony of painters had been reduced to one lady artist; but it was evident, from the pictures on the panels of the *salle-à-manger*, that many artists had stayed in the hotel during the summer.

Rochefort by morning light was quite a surprise. The hotel, with a few surrounding houses, was evidently situated on a high hill; the rest of the village lay below, wreathed, for the time being, in a white mist. It was a balmy autumn morning; the sunlight was clear and radiant; and I was filled with impatience to be out and at work. The market-place was just outside our hotel, and the streets were alive with people. A strange smell pervaded the place — something between cider apples and burning wood—and whenever I think of Rochefort that smell comes back to me, bringing with it vivid memories of the quaint little town as I saw it that day.

There is nothing modern about Rochefort. The

very air is suggestive of antiquity. Few villages in Brittany have retained their old simplicity of character; but Rochefort is one of them. Untouched and unspoilt by the march of modernity, she has stood still while most of her neighbours have been whirled into the vortex of civilization. Rochefort, like the Sleeping Beauty's palace, has lain as it was and unrepaired for years. Moss has sprung up between the cobble-stones of her streets; ferns and lichen grow on the broken-down walls; Nature and men's handiwork have been allowed their own sweet way—and a very sweet way they have in Rochefort. To enter the village one must descend a flight of stone steps between two high walls, green and dark with ivy and small green ferns growing in the niches. Very old walls they are, with here and there ancient carved doorways breaking the straight monotony. On one side is a garden, and over the time-worn stone-work tomato-coloured asters nod and wistaria throws her thick festoons of green, for the flowering season is past. Everything is dark and damp and moss-grown, and very silent. An old woman, with a terra-cotta pitcher full of water poised on her head, is toiling up the steps, the shortest way to the town, which, save for the singing of the birds in

the old château garden, the bleating of lambs on the hillside, and the chopping of a wood-cutter, is absolutely silent. One descends into a valley shut in by rugged blue-gray mountains, for all the world like a little Alpine village, or, rather, a Breton village in an Alpine setting. The mountains in parts are rocky and rugged, purple in aspect, and in parts overgrown with gray-green pines. There are stretches of wooded land, of golden-brown and russet trees, and great slopes of grass, the greenest I have ever seen. It is quite a little Swiss pastoral picture, such as one finds in children's story-books. On the mountain-side a woman, taking advantage of the sun, is busy drying her day's washing, and a little girl is driving some fat black-and-white cows into a field; while a sparkling river runs tumbling in white foam over boulders and fallen trees at the base. But Rochefort is a typically Breton village. Nowhere in Switzerland does one see such ancient walls, such gnarled old apple-trees, laden and bowed down to the earth with their weight of golden red fruit. Nowhere in Switzerland, I am sure, do you see such fine relics of architecture. Nearly every house in the village has something noble or beautiful in its construction. Renovation has not laid her dese-

AT ROCHFORT-EN-TERRE

crating hands on Rochefort. Here you see a house that was once a lordly dwelling; for there are remains of some fine sculpture round about the windows, remnants of magnificent mouldings over the door, a griffin's head jutting from the gray walls. There you see a double flight of rounded stone steps, with a balustrade leading up to a massive oak door. On the ancient steps chickens perch now, and over the doorway hang a bunch of withered mistletoe and the words 'Debit de Boisson.'

The village is full of surprises. Everywhere you may go in that little place you will see all about you pictures such as would drive most artists wild with joy. Everything in Rochefort seems to be more or less overgrown. Even in this late October you will see flowers and vines and all kinds of greenery growing rampant everywhere. You will see a white house almost covered with red rambling roses and yellowing vines, oleanders and cactus plants standing in tubs on either side of the door. There is not a wall over which masses of greenery do not pour, and not a window that does not hold its pot of red and pink geraniums. Two cats are licking their paws in two different windows. The sun has come out from the mists

which enveloped it, and shines in all its glory, hot and strong on your back, as it would in August. It is market day, and everyone is light-hearted and happy. The men whistle gaily on their way; the women's tongues wag briskly over their purchases; even the birds, forgetful of the coming winter, are bursting their throats with song. In the château garden the birds sing loudest of all, and the flowers bloom their best. It is a beautiful old place, the château of Rochefort. Very little of the ruin is left standing; but the grounds occupy an immense area, and are enclosed by great high walls. Where the old kitchen once stood an American has built a house out of the old bricks, using many of the ornamentations and stone gargoyles found about the place. It is an ingeniously designed building; yet one cannot but feel that a modern house is somewhat incongruous amid such historic surroundings. The old avenue leading to the front door still exists; also there are some apple-trees and ancient farm-buildings. The château has been built in the most beautiful situation possible, high above the town, on a kind of tableland, from which one can look down to the valley and the encircling hills.

Set up in a prominent position in the village,

MID-DAY REST

where two roads meet, is a gaudy crucifix, very large and newly painted. It is a realistic presentation of our Saviour on the cross, with the blood flowing redly from His side, the piercing of every thorn plainly demonstrated, and the drawn lines of agony in His face and limbs very much accentuated. Every market woman as she passes shifts her basket to the other arm, that she may make the sign of the cross and murmur her prayers; every man, woman, child, stops before the cross to make obeisance, some kneeling down in the dust for a few moments before passing on their way.

Who is to say that the image of that patient, suffering Saviour is not an influence for good in the village? Who is to say that the adoration, no matter how fleeting, does not soften, does not help, does not control, those humble peasant folk who bow before Him? Religion has an immense hold over the peasants of Brittany. It is the one thing of which they stand in dread. These images, you say, are dolls; but they are very realistic dolls. They teach the people their Bible history in a thorough, splendid way. They stand ever before them as something tangible to cling to, to believe in. And the images in the churches—do you mean

to say that they have no influence for good on the people? St. Stanislaus, the monk, for example, with cowl and shaven head—what an influence such a statue must have on the hearts of children! There is in his face a world of tender fatherly feeling for the little child in the white robe and golden girdle who is resting his head so wearily on the saint's shoulder, clasping a branch of faded lilies in his hand. Children look at this statue, and they picture St. Stanislaus in their minds always thus: they know what the saint looked like, what he did. He is not only a misty, dim, uncertain figure in the history of the Bible, but a tangible, living, vibrating reality, taking active part in their daily lives. For older children, boys especially, there is St. Antoine to admire and imitate—St. Antoine the hermit, with his staff and his book, the man with the strong, good face. Françoise d'Amboise, a pure, sweet saint in the habit of a nun, her arms full of lilies, appeals to the hearts and imaginations of all young girls. I believe in the efficacy of these figures and pictures. The peasants' brains are not of a sufficiently fine calibre to believe in a vague Christ, a vague Virgin, vague saints interpreted to them by the priests. If it were not for the images, men and women would not come to church, as they do at all

hours of the day, bringing their market baskets and their tools with them. They would not come in this way, spontaneously, joyfully, two or three times a day, to an empty church with only an altar. Church-going would then become a bare duty, forced and unreal, to be gradually dropped and discontinued. These people are able to see the sufferings of our Saviour on the cross, and everything that He had to undergo for us; also, there is something infinitely comforting in the Divine Figure, surrounded by myriads of candles and white flowers, with hands outstretched, bidding all who are weary and heavy-laden to come unto Him. The peasants contribute their few sous' worth of candles, and light them, and feel somehow or other that they have indeed rid themselves of sins and troubles.

The country round Rochefort is truly beautiful. The village lies in a hollow; but it is delightful to take one of the mountain-paths, and go up the rocky way into the pines and gorse and heather. As one sits on the hillside, looking down upon the village, it is absolutely still save for the cawing of some birds. You are out of the world up here. The quaint little gray hamlet lies far below. Between it and you is the fertile valley, with green

fields and groves of bushy trees. The country is quite cultivated for Brittany, where cabbage-fields and pasture-lands are rare. The mountains encircling the valley are of gray slate ; growing here and there amongst the slate are yellow gorse and purple heather.

It is a gray, dull day ; not a breath stirs the air, which is heavy and ominous. Evening is drawing on as one walks down the mountain-path towards home, and a haze is settling on the village ; the sun has been feebly trying to shine all day through the thick clouds that cover it. The green pines, with their purple stems, are very beautiful against the deeper purple of the mountains ; pretty, too, the homesteads on the hills, with their fields of cabbages and little plantations of flowers. There is a sweet smell of gorse and pine-needles and decaying bracken, and always one hears the caw of rooks.

In such a country as this, on such a day, amid such sights and sounds, you feel glad to be alive. You swing down the mountain-side quickly, and the beauty of it all enters into your soul, filling you with a nameless longing and yearning for you know not what, as Nature in her grandest moods always does. What rich colouring there is round about everywhere on this autumn afternoon ! The

A COTTAGE HOME

mountain-path leads, let us say, through a pine-wood. The leaves are far above your head; you seem to be walking in a forest of stems—long, slim, silver stems, purple in the shadows. On the ground is a carpet of salmon and brown leaves, with here and there a bracken-leaf which is absolutely the colour of pure gold.

There is no sound in the forest but your own footsteps and the rustle of the dry leaves as your dress brushes them. You emerge from the pine-forest on to a bare piece of mountain land, grayish purple, with patches of black. Then you dive into a chestnut-grove, where the leaves are green and brown and gold, and the earth is a rich brown. And so down the path into the village wrapped in a blue haze. The women in their cottages are bending busily over copper pots and pans on great open fireplaces of blazing logs. Little coloured bowls have been laid out on long polished tables for the evening meal, and the bright pewter plates have been brought down from the dresser. Lulu has been sent out to bring home bread for supper. 'Va, ma petite Lulu,' says her mother, 'dépêche toi.' And the small fat bundle in the check pinafore toddles hastily down the stone steps on chubby legs.

On the stone settles outside almost every house in the village families are sitting—the mothers and withered old grandmothers knitting or peeling potatoes, and the children munching apples and hunches of bread-and-butter. An old woman is washing her fresh green lettuce at the pump. As we mount the hill leading to the hotel and look back, night is fast descending on the village. The mountains have taken on a deeper purple; blue smoke rises from every cottage; the gray sky is changing to a faint citron yellow; the few slim pine-trees on the hills stand out against it jet-black, like sentinels.

VITRÉ

MEDIÆVAL HOUSES, VITRÉ

CHAPTER III

VITRÉ

For the etcher, the painter, the archæologist, and the sculptor, Vitré is an ideal town. To the archæologist it is an ever-open page from the Middle Ages, an almost complete relic of that period, taking one back with a strange force and realism three hundred years and more. Time has dealt tenderly with Vitré. The slanting, irregular houses, leaning one against the other, as if for mutual support, stand as by a miracle.

Wandering through Vitré, one seems to be visiting a wonderful and perfect museum, such as must needs please even the exacting, the blasé, and the indifferent. You are met at every turn by the works of the ancients in all their naïve purity and simplicity, many of the houses having been built in the first half of the seventeenth century.

One can have no conception of the energy of these early builders, fighting heroically against

difficulties such as we of the present day do not experience. They overcame problems of balance and expressed their own imaginations. Common masons with stone and brick and wood accomplished marvellous and audacious examples of architecture. They sought symmetry as well as the beautifying of their homes, covering them with ornamentations and sculpture in wood and stone. Without architects, without plans or designs, these men simply followed their own initiative, and the result has been absolute marvels of carpentry and stone-work, such as have withstood the onslaught of time and held their own.

When you first arrive at Vitré, at the crowded, bustling station, surrounded by the most modern of houses and hotels, and faced by the newest of fountains, disappointment is acute. If you were to leave Vitré next morning, never having penetrated into the town, you would carry away a very feeble and uninteresting impression; but, having entered the town, and discovered those grand old streets — the Baudrarie, the Poterie, and the Nôtre Dame, among many others—poet, painter, sculptor, man of business or of letters, whoever you may be, you cannot

fail to be astonished, overwhelmed, and delighted. A quiet old-world air pervades the streets; no clatter and rattle of horses' hoofs disturbs their serenity; no busy people, hurrying to and fro, fill the pathways. Handcarts are the only vehicles, and the inhabitants take life quietly. Often for the space of a whole minute you will find yourself quite alone in a street, save for a hen and chickens that are picking up scraps from the gutter.

In these little old blackened streets, ever so narrow, into which the sun rarely penetrates except to touch the upper stories with golden rays, there are houses of every conceivable shape—there are houses of three stories, each story projecting over the other; houses so old that paint and plaster will stay on them no longer; houses with pointed roofs; houses with square roofs thrust forward into the street, spotted by yellow moss; houses the façades of which are covered with scaly gray tiles, glistening in the sun like a knight's armour. These are placed in various patterns according to the taste and fantasy of the architect: sometimes they are cut round, sometimes square, and sometimes they are placed like the scales of a fish. There are houses, whose upper stories, advancing into the middle of the street,

are kept up by granite pillars, forming an arcade underneath, and looking like hunchbacked men; there are the houses of the humble artisans and the houses of the proud noblemen; houses plain and simple in architecture; houses smothered with carvings in wood and stone of angels and saints and two-headed monsters—houses of every shape and kind imaginable. In a certain zigzag, tortuous street the buildings are one mass of angles and sloping lines, one house leaning against another,—noble ruins of the ages. The plaster is falling from the walls; the slates are slipping from the roofs; and the wood is becoming worm-eaten.

It is four o'clock on a warm autumn afternoon; the sun is shining on one side of this narrow street, burnishing gray roofs to silver, resting lovingly on the little balconies, with their pendent washing and red pots of geranium. The men are returning from their work and the children from their schools; the workaday hours are ended, and the houses teem with life. A woman is standing in a square sculptured doorway trying to teach her little white-faced fluffy-haired baby to say 'Ma! ma!' This he positively refuses to do; but he gurgles and chuckles at intervals, at which his mother shakes him and calls him 'petit gamin.'

PREPARING THE MID-DAY MEAL

All Bretons love the sun; they are like little children in their simple joy of it. A workman passing says to a girl leaning out of a low latticed window:

'C'est bon le soleil?'

'Mais oui: c'est pour cela que j'y suis,' she answers.

One house has an outside staircase of chocolate-coloured wood, spirally built, with carved balustrades. On one of the landings an old woman is sitting. She has brought out a chair and placed it in the sunniest corner. She is very old, and wears the snowiest of white caps on her gray hair; her wrinkled pink hands, with their red worsted cuffs, are working busily at her knitting; and every now and then she glances curiously through the banisters into the street below, like a little bright bird.

There are white houses striped with brown crossbars, each with its little shallow balcony. Above, the white plaster has nearly all fallen away, revealing the beautiful old original primrose-yellow.

Curiosity shops are abundant everywhere, dim and rich in colour with the reds and deep tones of old polished wood, the blue of china, and the

glistening yellow of brass. Ancient houses there are, with scarcely any windows: the few that one does see are heavily furnished with massive iron-nailed shutters or grated with rusty red iron; the doorways are of heaviest oak, crowned with coats of arms sculptured in stone. Large families of dirty children now live in these lordly domains.

One longs in Vitré, above all other places, to paint, or, rather, to etch. Vitré is made for the etcher; endless and wondrous are the subjects for his needle. Here, in a markedly time-worn street, are a dozen or more pictures awaiting him—a doorway aged and blackened alternately by the action of the sun and by that of the rain, and carved in figures and symbols sculptured in stone, through which one catches glimpses of a courtyard wherein two men are shoeing a horse; then, again, there is an obscure shop, so calm and tranquil that one asks one's self if business can ever be carried on there. As you peer into the darkness, packets of candles, rope, and sugar are faintly discernible, also dried fish and bladders of lard suspended from the ceiling; in a far corner is an old woman in a white cap—all this in deepest shadow. Above, the clear yellow autumn sunlight shines in a perfect blaze upon the primrose-coloured walls, crossed

IN CHURCH

with beams of blackest wood, making the slates on the pointed roofs scintillate, and touching the windows here and there with a golden light.

Side by side with this wonderful old house, the glories of which it is impossible to describe in mere words, a new one has been built—not in a modern style, but striving to imitate the fine old structures in this very ancient street. The contrast, did it not grate on one's senses, would be laughable. Stucco is pressed into the service to represent the original old stone, and varnished deal takes the place of oak beams with their purple bloom gathered through the ages. The blocks of stone round the doors and windows have been laboriously hewn, now large, now small, and placed artistically and carelessly zigzag, pointed with new black cement. This terrible house is interesting if only to illustrate what age can do to beautify and modernity to destroy.

Madonnas, crucifixes, pictures of saints in glass cases, and statuettes of the Virgin, meet you at every turn in Vitré, for the inhabitants are proverbially a religious people. A superstitious yet guilty conscience would have a trying time in Vitré. In entering a shop, St. Joseph peers down upon you from a niche above the portal; at every

street corner, in every market, and in all kinds of quaint and unexpected places, saints and angels look out at you.

The beautiful old cathedral, Nôtre Dame de Vitré, is one of the purest remaining productions of the decadent Gothic art in Brittany, and one of the finest. Several times the grand old edifice has been enlarged and altered, and the changes in art can be traced through different additions as in the pages of a book. It is a comparatively low building, the roof of which is covered by a forest of points or spires, and at the apex of each point is a stone cross. In fact, the characteristics of this building are its points: the windows are shaped in carved points, and so are the ornamentations on the projecting buttresses. The western door, very finely carved and led up to by a flight of rounded steps, is of the Renaissance period. In colouring, the cathedral is gray, blackened here and there, but not much stained by damp or lichen, except the tower, which seems to be of an earlier date. The stained-glass windows, seen from the outside, are of a dim, rich colouring; and on one of the outside walls has been built an exterior stone pulpit, ornamented with graceful points, approached from the church by a slit in the wall. It was

PÈRE LOUIS

constructed to combat the Calvinistic party, so powerful in Vitré at one time. One can easily imagine the seething crowd in the square below—the sea of pale, passionate, upturned faces. It must have presented much the same picture then as it does now, this cathedral square in Vitré—save for the people;—for there are still standing, facing the pulpit, and not a hundred paces from it, a row of ancient houses that existed in those very riotous times. Every line of those once stately domains slants at a different angle now, albeit they were originally built in a solid style—square-fronted and with pointed roofs, the upper stories projecting over the pavement, with arcades beneath. Some are painted white, with gray woodwork; others yellow, with brown wood supports. Outside one of the houses, once a butcher's shop, hangs a boar's head, facing the stone pulpit. What scenes that old animal must have witnessed in his time, gazing so passively with those glassy brown eyes! If only it could speak!

Convent-bred girls in a long line are filing into church through the western door—meek-faced little people in black pinafores and shiny black hats. All wear their hair in pigtails, and above their boots an inch or so of coloured woollen stockings is

visible. Each carries a large Prayer-Book under her arm. A reverend Mother, in snowy white cap and flowing black veil, heads the procession, and another brings up the rear.

The main door facing the square is flung wide open; and the contrast between the brilliant sunlit square, with its noisy laughing children returning from school, dogs barking, and handcarts rattling over the cobble stones, and this dim, sombre interior, bathed in richest gloom, is almost overwhelming.

A stained-glass window at the opposite end of the church, with the light at the back of it, forms the only patch of positive colour, with its brilliant reds and purples and blues. All else is dim and rich and gloomy, save here and there where the glint of brass, the gold of the picture-frames, the white of the altar-cloth, or the ruby of an ever-burning light, can be faintly discerned in the obscurity. The deep, full notes of the organ reach you as you stand at the cathedral steps, and you detect the faint odour of incense. The figure of a woman kneeling with clasped hands and bent head is dimly discernible in the heavy gloom. One glance into such an interior, after coming from the glare and glamour of the outside world, cannot

but bring peace and rest and a soothing influence to even the most unquiet soul.

The château of Vitré is an even older building than the cathedral. It has lived bravely through the ages, suffering little from the march of time: a noble edifice, huge and massive, with its high towers, its châtelet, and its slate roofs. Just out of the dark, narrow, cramped old streets, you are astonished to emerge suddenly on a large open space, and to be confronted by this massive château, well preserved and looking almost new. As a matter of fact, its foundation dates back as far as the eleventh century, although four hundred years ago it was almost entirely reconstructed. Parts of the château are crumbling to decay; but the principal mass, consisting of the towers and châtelet, is marvellously preserved. It still keeps a brave front, though the walls and many of the castle keeps and fortresses are tottering to ruin. Many a shock and many a siege has the old château withstood; but now its fighting days are over. The frogs sing no longer in the moat through the beautiful summer nights; the sentinel's box is empty; and in the courtyards, instead of clanking swords and spurred heels, the peaceful step of the tourist alone resounds. The château has rendered a long

and loyal service, and to-day as a reward enjoys a glorious repose. To visit the castle, you pass over a draw-bridge giving entrance to the châtelet, and no sooner have you set foot on it than the concierge emerges from a little room in the tower dedicated to the service of the lodge-holder.

She is a very up-to-date chatelaine, trim and neat, holding a great bunch of keys in her hand. She takes you into a huge grass-grown courtyard in the interior, whence you look up at the twin towers, capped with pointed gray turrets, and see them in all their immensity. The height and strength and thickness of the walls are almost terrifying. She shows you a huge nail-studded door, behind which is a stone spiral staircase leading to an underground passage eight miles long. This door conjures up to the imaginative mind all kinds of romantic and adventurous stories. We are taken into the Salle des Guardes, an octagonal stone room on an immense scale, with bay windows, the panes of which are of stained glass, and a gigantic chimneypiece. One can well imagine the revels that must have gone on round that solid oak table among the waiting guards.

The chatelaine leads us up a steep spiral staircase built of solid granite, from which many rooms

IDLE HOURS

branch, all built in very much the same style —octagonal and lofty, with low doorways. One must stoop to enter. On the stairway, at intervals of every five or six steps, there are windows with deep embrasures, in which one can stand and gain a commanding view of the whole country. These, it is needless to say, were used in the olden days for military purposes.

As the chatelaine moves on, ever above us, with her clanking keys, one can take one's self back to the Middle Ages, and imagine the warrior's castle as it was then, when the chatelaine, young, sweet, and pretty, wending her way about the dark and gloomy castle, was the only humane and gentle spirit there. Easier still is it to lose yourself in the dim romantic past when you are shown into a room which, though no fire burns on the hearth, is still quite warm, redolent of tapestry and antiquity. This room is now used as a kind of museum. It is filled with fine examples of old china, sufficient to drive a collector crazy, enamels, old armour, rubies, ornaments, sculpture, medals, firearms, and instruments of torture.

Sitting in a deep window-seat, surrounded by the riches of ancient days, with the old-world folk peering out from the tapestried walls, one can easily

close one's eyes and lose one's self for a moment in the gray past, mystic and beautiful. It is delightful to summon to your mind the poetical and pathetic figure of (let us say) a knight imprisoned in the tower on account of his prominent and all-devouring love for some unapproachable fair one; or of that other who, pinning a knot of ribbon on his coat,—his lady's colour—set out to fight and conquer. But, alas! no chronicle has been left of the deeds of the castle prisoners. Any romantic stories that one may conjure to one's mind in the atmosphere of the château can be but the airiest fabrics of a dream.

At the top of the spiral staircase is a rounded gallery, with loopholes open to the day, through which one can gain a magnificent, though somewhat dizzy, view over town and country. It was from this that the archers shot their arrows upon the enemy; and very deadly their aim must have been, for nothing could be more commanding as regards position than the château of Vitré. Also, in the floor of the gallery, round the outer edge, are large holes, down which the besieged threw great blocks of stone, boiling tar, and projectiles of all kinds, which must have fallen with tremendous violence on the assailants.

Wherever one goes in Vitré one sees the fine old château, forming a magnificent background to every picture, with its grand ivy-mantled towers and its huge battlemented walls, belittling everything round it. Unlike most French châteaus, more or less showy and toy-like in design, the castle of Vitré is built on solid rock, and lifted high above the town in a noble, irresistible style, with walls of immense thickness, and lofty beyond compare. All that is grandest and most beautiful in Nature seems to group itself round about the fine old castle, as if Nature herself felt compelled to pay tribute of her best to what was noblest in the works of man. In the daytime grand and sweeping white clouds on a sky of eggshell blue group themselves about the great gray building. At twilight, when the hoary old castle appears a colossal purple mass, every tower and every turret strongly outlined against the sunset sky, Nature comes forward with her brilliant palette and paints in a background of glorious prismatic hues: great rolling orange and pink clouds on a sky of blue—combination sufficient to send a colourist wild with joy.

Every inch of the castle walls has been utilized in one way or another to economize material.

Houses have been built hanging on to and clustering about the walls, sometimes perched on the top of them, like limpets on a rock. Often one sees a fine battlemented wall, fifty or sixty feet in height, made of great rough stone, brown and golden and purple with age—a wall which, one knows, must have withstood many a siege—with modern iron balconies jutting out from it, balconies of atrocious pattern, painted green or gray, with gaudy Venetian blinds. It is absolute desecration to see leaning from these balconies, against such a background, untidy, fat, dirty women, with black, lank hair, and peasants knitting worsted socks, where once fair damsels of ancient times waved their adieux to departing knights. Then, again, how terrible it is to see glaring advertisements of *Le Petit Journal*, Benedictine Liqueur, Singer's Sewing Machines, and Byrrh, plastered over a fine old sculptured doorway!

There are in certain parts of the town remains of the ancient moat. Sometimes it is a mere brook, black as night, flowing with difficulty among thick herbage which has grown up round it; sometimes a prosperous, though always dirty, stream. You come across it in unexpected places here and there. In one part, just under the walls of

LA VIEILLE MÈRE PEROT

the castle, where the water is very dirty indeed, wash-houses have been erected ; there the women kneel on flat stones by the banks. The houses clustering round about the moat are damp and evil-smelling ; their slates, green with mould, are continually slipping off the roofs ; and the buildings themselves slant at such an angle that their entry into the water seems imminent.

At the base of the castle walls the streets mount steeply. This is a very poor quarter indeed. The houses are old, blackened, decayed, much-patched and renovated. Yet the place is extremely picturesque ; in fact, I know no part of Vitré that is not.

At any moment, in any street, you can stop and frame within your hands a picture which will be almost sure to compose well—which in colouring and drawing will be the delight of painters and etchers. In these particular streets of which I speak antiquity reigns supreme. Here no traffic ever comes ; only slatternly women, with their wretched dogs and cats of all breeds, fill the streets. Many of the houses are half built out of solid slate, and the steps leading to them are hewn from the rock.

One sees no relics of bygone glory here. This

must ever have been a poor quarter; for the windows are built low to the ground, and there are homely stone settles outside each door. Pigs and chickens walk in and out of the houses with as much familiarity as the men and women. On every shutter strings of drying fish are hung; and every window in every house, no matter how poor, has its rows of pink and red geraniums and its pots of hanging fern. Birds also are abundant; in fact, from the first I dubbed this street 'the street of the birds,' for I never before saw so many caged birds gathered together—canaries, bull-finches, jackdaws, and birds of bright plumage. By the sound one might fancy one's self for the moment in an African jungle rather than in a Breton village.

The streets of Vitré are remarkable for their flowers. Wherever you may look you will see pots of flowers and trailing greenery, relieving with their bright fresh colouring the time-worn houses of blackened woodwork and sombre stone. Not only do moss and creepers abound, but also there are gardens everywhere, over the walls of which trail vines and clematis, and on every window-ledge are pots of geranium and convolvulus.

It is impossible in mere words to convey any

real impression of the fine old town of Vitré: only the etcher and the painter can adequately depict it. The grand old town will soon be of the past. Every day, every hour, its walls are decaying, crumbling; and before long Vitré will be no more than a memory.

A VIEILLARD

VANNES

CHAPTER IV

VANNES

A DEAR old-world, typically Breton town is Vannes. We arrived at night, and gazed expectantly from our window on the moonlit square. We plied with questions the man who carried up our boxes. His only answer was that we should see everything on the morrow.

That was market-day, and the town was unusually busy. Steering for what we thought the oldest part of Vannes, we took a turning which led past ancient and crazy-looking houses. Very old houses indeed they were, with projecting upper stories, beams, and scaly roofs slanting at all angles. At Morlaix some of the streets are ancient; but I have never seen such eccentric broken lines as at Vannes. At one corner the houses leant forward across the street, and literally rested one on the top of the other. These were only the upper stories; below were up-to-date jewellers and *pâtisseries*, with newly-painted signs in black and

gold. In the middle of these houses, cramped and crowded and hustled by them, stood the cathedral. Inside it was a dim, lofty edifice, with faintly burning lamps. Hither the market-women come with their baskets, stuffed to the full with fresh green salad and apples, laying them down on the floor that they may kneel on praying-chairs, cross their arms, and raise their eyes to the high-altar, pouring out trouble or joy to God. It was delightful to see rough men with their clean market-day blue linen blouses kneeling on the stone floor, hats in hand and heads bowed, repeating their morning prayers.

The people were heavily laden on this bright autumn morning, either with baskets or with sacks or dead fowls, all clattering through the cobbled streets on their way to market. Following the crowd, we emerged on a triangular-shaped market-place, wherein a most dramatic-looking *mairie* or town-hall figured prominently, a large building with two flights of steps leading up to it, culminating in a nail-studded door, with the arms of Morbihan inscribed above it.

One can well imagine such a market-place, let us say, in the days of the Revolution: how some orator would stand on these steps, with his

PLACE HENRI QUATRE, VANNES

DE CIRE
FABRIQUE

back to that door, haranguing the crowd, holding them all enthralled by the force of rhetoric. Now nothing so histrionic happens. There is merely a buzzing throng of white-capped women, haggling and bargaining as though their lives depended on it, with eyes and hearts and minds for nothing but their business. Here and there we saw knots of blue-bloused men, with whips hung over their shoulders and straws in their mouths, more or less loafing and watching their womenfolk. The square was filled with little wooden stalls, where meat was sold—stringy-looking meat, and slabs of purple-hued beef. How these peasant women bargained! I saw one old lady arguing for quite a quarter of an hour over a piece of beef not longer than your finger. Chestnuts were for sale in large quantities, and housewives were buying their stocks for the winter. The men of the family had been pressed into the service to carry up sack after sack of fine brown glossy nuts, which were especially plentiful. No one seemed over-anxious to sell; no one cried his wares: it was the purchasers who appeared to do most of the talking and haggling.

There were more Frenchwomen here than I have seen in any other town; but they were not fine ladies by any means. They did not detract

from the picturesqueness of the scene. They went round with their great baskets, getting them filled with apples or chestnuts, or other things. Most of the saleswomen were wrinkled old bodies; but one woman, selling chestnuts and baskets of pears, was pretty and quite young, with a mauve apron and a black cross-over shawl, and a mouth like iron. I watched her with amusement. I had never seen so young and comely a person so stern and business-like. Not a single centime would she budge from her stated price. She was pestered by women of all kinds—old and young, peasants and modern French ladies, all attracted by the beauty of her pears and the glossiness of her chestnuts. Hers were the finest wares in the market, and she was fully conscious of it, pricing her pears and chestnuts a sou more a sieveful than anyone else. The customers haggled with her, upbraided her, tried every feminine tactic. They sneered at her chestnuts and railed at her pears; they scoffed one with the other. Eventually they gave up a centime themselves; but the hard mouth did not relax, and the pretty head in the snow-white coif was shaken vigorously. At this, with snorts of disgust, her customers turned up their noses and left. Ere long a smartly-dressed woman came

along, and all unsuspectingly bought a sieveful of chestnuts, emptying them into her basket. When she came to pay for them, she discovered they were a sou more than she had expected, and emptied them promptly back into the market-woman's sack. I began to be afraid that my pretty peasant would have to dismount from her high horse or go home penniless; but this was not the case. Several women gathered round and began to talk among themselves, nudging one another and pointing. At last one capitulated, hoisted the white flag, and bought a few pears. Instantly all the other women laid down their bags and baskets and began to buy her pears and chestnuts. Very soon this stall became the most popular in the market-place, and the young woman and her assistant were kept busy the whole day. The hard-mouthed girl had conquered!

'Sept sous la demi-douzaine! Sept sous la demi-douzaine!' cried a shrill-voiced vendor. It was a man from Paris with a great boxful of shiny tablespoons, wrapped in blue tissue-paper in bundles of six, which he was offering for the ridiculous sum of seven sous — that is, threepence halfpenny. Naturally, with such bargains to offer, he was selling rapidly. Directly he cried his 'Sept sous la demi-douzaine—six pour sept sous!' he was literally

surrounded. Men and women came up one after the other ; men's hands flew to their pockets under their blouses, and women's to their capacious leather purses. It was amusing to watch these people—they were so guileless, so childlike, so much pleased with their bargains. Still, it would break my heart if these spoons doubled up and cracked or proved worthless, for seven sous is a great deal of money to the Breton peasants. I never saw merchandise disappear so quickly. 'Solide, solide, solide!' cried the merchant, until you would think he must grow hoarse. 'This is the chance of a lifetime,' he declared : 'a beautiful half-dozen like this. C'est tout ce qu'il y a de plus joli et solide. Voyez la beauté et la qualité de cette merchandise. C'est une occasion que vous ne verrez pas tous les jours.'

The people became more and more excited ; the man was much pressed, and selling the spoons like wildfire. Then, there were umbrellas over which the women lost their heads—glossy umbrellas with fanciful handles and flowers and birds round the edge. First the merchant took up an umbrella and twisted it round, then the spoons, and clattered them invitingly, until people grew rash and bought both umbrellas and spoons.

GOSSIPS

There is nothing more amusing than to spend a morning thus, wandering through the market-place, watching the peasants transact their little business, which, though apparently trivial, is serious to them. I never knew any people quite so thrifty as these Bretons. You see them selling and buying, not only old clothes, but also bits of old clothes—a sleeve from a soldier's coat, a leg from a pair of trousers; and even then the stuff will be patched. In this market-place you see stalls of odds and ends, such as even the poorest of the poor in England would not hesitate to throw on the rubbish heap—old iron, leaking bottles, legs of chairs and tables.

A wonderful sight is the market on a morning such as this. The sun shines full on myriads of white-capped women thronging through the streets, and on lines of brown-faced vegetable vendors sitting close to the ground among their broad open baskets of carrots and apples and cabbages. There are stalls of all kinds—butchers' stalls, forming notes of colour with their vivid red meat; haberdashery stalls, offering everything from a tooth-brush or a boot-lace to the most excruciatingly brilliant woollen socks; stalls where clothes are sold — such as children's checked pinafores and

babies' caps fit for dolls. Most brilliant of all are the material booths, where every kind of material is sold—from calico to velvet. They congregate especially in a certain corner of the market-square, and even the houses round about are draped with lengths of material stretching from the windows down to the ground—glorious sweeps of checks and stripes and flowered patterns, and pink and blue flannelette. It is amusing to watch a Breton woman buying a length of cloth. She will pull it, and drag it, and smell it, and almost eat it; she will ask her husband's advice, and the advice of her husband's relations, and the advice of her own relations.

In this market I was much amused to watch two men selling. I perceived what a great deal more there is in the individuality of the man who sells and in the manner of his selling than in the actual quality of the merchandise. One man, a dull, foolish fellow, with bales and bales of material, never had occasion to unwrap one: he never sold a thing. Another man, a born salesman, with the same wares to offer, talked volubly in a high-pitched voice. He called the people to him; he called them by name—whether it was the right one or not did not matter: it was sufficient to

arrest their attention. 'Dépêchons nous. Here, Lucien; here, Jeanne; here, Babette; here, my pigeon. Dépêchons nous, dépêchons nous!' he cried. 'Que est ce qu'il y a? personne en veux plus? Mais c'est épatant. Je suis honteux de vous en dire le prix. Flannel! the very thing for your head, madam,—nothing softer, nothing finer. How many yards?—one, two, three? There we are!' and, with a flash of the scissors and a toss of the stuff, the flannel is cut off, wrapped up and under the woman's arm, before the gaping salesman opposite has time to close his mouth.

The stall was arranged in a kind of semicircle, and very soon this extraordinary person had gathered a crowd of people, all eager to buy; and the way in which he appeared to attend to everyone at once was simply marvellous.

'What for you, madam?' he would ask, turning to a young Breton woman. 'Pink flannel? Here you are—a superb article, the very thing for nightgowns.' Then to a man: 'Trousering, my lord? Certainly. Touchez moi ça. Isn't that marvellous? Isn't that quality if you like? Ah! but I am ashamed to tell you the price. You will be indeed beautiful in this to-morrow.'

As business became slack for the moment, he

would take up some cheap print and slap it on his knee, crying:

'One sou—one sou the yard! Figure yourself dancing with an apron like that at one sou the yard!'

And so the man would continue throughout the day, shouting, screaming, always inventing new jokes, selling his wares very quickly, and always gathering more and more people round him. Once he looked across at his unfortunate rival, who was listening to his nonsense with a sneering expression.

'Yes: you may sneer, my friend; but I am selling, and you are not,' he retorted.

Endless—absolutely endless—are the peeps of human nature one gains on a market-day such as this in an old-world Breton town. I spent the time wandering among the people, and not once did I weary. At every turn I saw something to marvel at, something to admire. We had chanced on a particularly interesting day, when the whole town was turned into a great market. Wherever we went there was a market of some sort—a pig market, or a horse market, or an old-clothes market; almost every street was lined with booths and barrows.

Outside almost every drinking-house, or Café

A CATTLE-MARKET

Breton, lay a fat pig sleeping contentedly on the pavement, and tied to a string in the wall, built there for that purpose. He would be waiting while his master drank—for often men come in to Vannes from miles away, and walk back with their purchases. I saw an old woman who had just bought a pig trying to take it home. She had the most terrible time with that animal. First he raced along the road with her at great speed, almost pulling her arms out of the sockets, and making the old lady run as doubtless she had never run before; then he walked at a sedate pace, persistently between her feet, so that either she must ride him straddle-legs or not get on at all; lastly, the pig wound himself and the string round and round her until neither could move a step. A drunken man reeled along, and, seeing the hopeless muddle of the old lady and the pig, stopped in front of them and tried to be of some assistance. He took off his hat and scratched his head; then he poked the pig with his cane, and moved round the woman and pig, giving advice; finally, he flew into a violent rage because he could not solve the mystery, and the old lady waved him aside with an impatient gesture. The air was filled with grunts and groans and blood-curdling squeaks.

Everyone seemed to possess a pig: either he or she had just bought one or had one for sale. You saw bunches of the great fat pink animals tied to railings while the old women gossiped; you saw pigs, attached to carts, comfortably sleeping in the mud; you saw them being led along the streets like dogs by neatly-dressed dames, holding them by their tails, and giving them a twist every time they were rebellious.

Vannes is the most beautiful old town imaginable. Everywhere one goes one sees fine old archways of gray stone, ancient and lofty—relics of a bygone age—with the arms of Brittany below and a saint with arms extended in blessing above. When once you reach the outskirts of the town you realize that at one time Vannes must have been enclosed by walls: there are gateways remaining still, and little bits of broken-down brickwork, old and blackened, and half-overgrown with moss and grasses. There is a moat running all round—it is inky black and dank now—on the banks of which a series of sloping slate sheds and washhouses have been built, where the women wash their clothes, kneeling on the square flat stones. How anything could emerge clean and white from such pitch-black water is a marvel. Seen from outside the

gates, this town is very beautiful—the black water of the moat, the huddled figures of the women, with their white caps and snowy piles of linen, and beyond that green grass and apple-trees and flowers, and at the back the old grayish-pink walls, with carved buttresses.

There is hardly a town in the whole of Brittany so ancient as Vannes. These walls speak for themselves. They speak of the time when Vannes was the capital of the rude Venetes who made great Cæsar hesitate, and retarded him in his conquest of the Gauls. They speak of the twenty-one emigrants, escaped from the Battle of Quiberon, who were shot on the promenade of the Garenne, under the great trees where the children play to-day. What marvellous walls these are! With what care they have been built—so stout, so thick, so colossal! It must have taken men of great strength to build such walls as these—men who resented all newcomers with a bitter hatred, and built as if for their very lives, determined to erect something which should be impregnable. Still they stand, gray and battered, with here and there remains of their former grandeur in carved parapets, projecting turrets, and massive sculptured doorways. At one time the town must have been well within the walls; but

now it has encroached. The white and pink and yellow-faced tall houses perch on the top of, lean against and cluster round, the old gray walls.

It seems strange to live in a town where the custom of *couvre-feu* is still observed by the inhabitants—in a town where no sooner does the clock strike nine than all lights are out, all shutters closed, and all shops shut. This is the custom in Vannes. It is characteristic of the people. The Vanntais take a pride in being faithful to old usages. They are a sturdy, grave, pensive race, hiding indomitable energy and hearts of fire under the calmest demeanour. The women are fine creatures. I shall never forget seeing an old woman chopping wood. All day long she worked steadily in the open place, wielding an immensely heavy hatchet, and chopping great branches of trees into bundles of sticks. There she stood in her red-and-black checked petticoat, her dress tucked up, swinging her hatchet, and holding the branches with her feet. She seemed an Amazon.

In Vannes, as in any part of Brittany, one always knows when there is anything of importance happening, by the clatter of the sabots on the cobble stones. On the afternoon when we were

BREAD STALLS

there the noise was deafening. We heard it through the closed windows while we were at luncheon — big sabots, little sabots, men's nail-studded sabots, women's light ones, little children's persistent clump, clump, clump, all moving in the same direction. It was the Foire des Oignons, observed the waiter. I had imagined that there had been a *foire* of everything conceivable that day ; but onions scarcely entered into my calculations. I should not have thought them worthy of a *foire* all to themselves. The waiter spoiled my meal completely. I could no longer be interested in the very attractive menu. Onions were my one and only thought. I lived and had my being but for onions. Mother and I sacrificed ourselves immediately on the altar of onions. We rushed from the room, much to the astonishment of several rotund French officers, who were eating, as usual, more than was good for them.

Everybody was concerned with onions. We drew up in the rear of a large onion-seeking crowd. It was interesting to watch the back views of these peasants as they mounted the hill. There were all kinds of backs—fat backs, thin backs, glossy black backs, and faded green ones ; backs of men with floating ribbons and velveteen coats ; plump backs

of girls with neat pointed shawls—some mauve, some purple, some pink, some saffron.

At the top of the hill was the market-square—a busy scene. The square was packed, and everyone was talking volubly in the roughest Breton dialect. Now and then a country cart painted blue, the horse hung round the neck with shaggy black fur and harnessed with the rough wooden gear so general in Brittany, would push through the crowd of busily-talking men and women. Everything conceivable was for sale. At certain stalls there were sweets of all colours, yet all tasting the same and made of the worst sugar. I saw the same man still selling his spoons and umbrellas; but he was fat and comfortable now. He had had his *déjeuner*, and was not nearly so excited and amusing. Fried sardines were sold with long rolls of bread; also sausages. They cook the sardines on iron grills, and a mixed smell of sausages, sardines, and chestnuts filled the air. Everyone was a little excited and a little drunk. Long tables had been brought out into the place where the men sat in their blue blouses and black velvet hats,—their whips over their shoulders, drinking cider and wine out of cups,—discussing cows and horses.

There was a cattle market there that day. This

was soon manifest, for men in charge of cows and pigs pushed their way among the crowd. On feeling a weight at your back now and then, you discovered a cow or a pig leaning against you for support. A great many more animals were assembled on a large square—pigs and cows and calves and horses. One could stay for days and watch a cattle market: it is intensely interesting. The way the people bargain is very strange. I saw a man and a woman buying a cow from a young Breton. The man opened its eyelids wide with his finger and thumb; he gazed in the gentle brown eyes; he stroked her soft gray neck; he felt her ribs, and poked his fingers in her side; he lifted one foot after the other; he punched and probed her for quite a quarter of an hour; and the cow stood there patiently. The woman looked on with a hard, knowing expression, applauding at every poke, and talking volubly the while. She drew into the discussion a friend passing by, and asked her opinion constantly, yet never took it. All the while the owner stood stroking his cow's back, without uttering a word.

He was a handsome young man, as Bretons often are—tall and slim, with a face like an antique bronze, dark and classic;—he wore a short black

coat trimmed with shabby velvet, tightly-fitting trousers, and a black hat with velvet streamers. The stateliness of the youth struck me: he held himself like an emperor. These Bretons look like kings, with their fine brown classic features; they hold themselves so haughtily, they remind one of figure-heads on old Roman coins. They seem men born to command; yet they command nothing, and live like pigs with the cows and hogs. The Breton peasant is full of dirt and dignity, living on coarse food, and rarely changing his clothes; yet nowhere will you meet with such fine bearing, charm of manner, and nobility of feature as among the peasants of Brittany.

On entering the poorest cottage, you are received with old-world courtesy by the man of the house, who comes forward to meet you in his working garments, with dirt thick upon his hands, but with dignity and stateliness, begging that you will honour his humble dwelling with your presence. He sets the best he has in the house before you. It may be only black bread and cider; but he bids you partake of it with a regal wave of his hand which transforms the humble fare.

These peasants remind me very much of Sir Henry Irving. Some of the finest types are

IN A BRETON KITCHEN

curiously like him in feature : they have the same magnificent profile and well-shaped head. It is quite startling to come across Sir Henry in black gaiters, broad-brimmed hat, and long hair streaming in the wind, ploughing in the dark-brown fields, or chasing a pig, or, dressed in gorgeous holiday attire, perspiring manfully through a village gavotte. Surely none but a Breton could chase a pig without losing self-respect, or count the teeth in a cow's mouth and look dignified at the same time. No one else could dance up and down in the broiling sunshine for an hour and preserve a composed demeanour. The Breton peasant is a person quite apart from the rest of the world. One feels, whether at a pig market or a wayside shrine, that these people are dreamers living in a romantic past. Unchanged and unpolished by the outside world, they cling to their own traditions ; every stone in their beloved country is invested by them with poetic and heroic associations. Brittany looks as if it must have always been as it is now, even in the days of the Phœnicians ; and it seems impossible to imagine the country inhabited by any but medieval people.

There were many fine figures of men in this cattle market, all busy at the game of buying

and selling. A Frenchman and his wife were strolling round the square, intent on buying a pony. The man evidently knew nothing about horses — very few Frenchmen do;—and it was ridiculous to watch the way in which he felt the animal's legs and stroked its mane, with a wise expression, while his wife looked on admiringly. Bretons take a long time over their bargains: sometimes they will spend a whole day arguing over two sous, and then end by not buying the pig or the cow, whatever it is, at all. The horses looked tired and bored with the endless bargains, as they leant their heads against one another. Now and then one was taken out and trotted up and down the square; then two men clasped hands once, and went off to a café to drink. If they clasp hands a third time the bargain will be closed.

Market-day in Vannes is an excuse for frivolity. We came upon a great crowd round two men under a red umbrella, telling fortunes. One man's eyes were blindfolded. He was the medium. The people were listening to his words with guileless attention and seriousness. Then a man and a woman, both drunk, were singing songs about the Japanese and Russian War, dragging in 'France' and 'la gloire,' and selling the words, forcing young

Frenchmen and soldiers to buy sheets of nonsense for which they had no use. There were stalls of imitation flowers—roses and poppies and chrysanthemums of most impossible colours—gazed at with covetous eyes by the more well-to-do housewives.

Hats were sold in great numbers at the Foire des Oignons. It seemed to be fashionable to buy a black felt hat on that day. The fair is held only once a year. and farmers and their families flock to it from miles round. It is the custom, when a good bargain is made, to buy new hats for the entire family. Probably there will be no opportunity of seeing a shop again during the rest of the year. The trade in hats is very lively. Women from Auray, in three-cornered shawls and wide white-winged caps, sit all day long sewing broad bands of velvet ribbon on black beaver hats, stretching it round the crown and leaving it to fall in two long streamers at the back. They sew quickly, for they have more work than they can possibly accomplish during the day. It is amusing to watch the customers. I sat on the stone balustrade which runs round the open square of the Hôtel de Ville, whither all the townswomen come as to a circus, bringing their

families, and eating their meals in the open air, that they may watch the strangers coming and going about their business, either on foot or in carts. It was as good as a play. A young man, accompanied by another man, an old lady, and three young girls, had come shyly up to the stall. It was obvious that he was coming quite against his will and at the instigation of his companions. He hummed and hawed, fidgeted, blushed, and looked as wretched and awkward as a young man could. One hat after another was tried on his head; but none of them would fit. He was the object of all eyes. The townswomen hooted at him, and his own friends laughed. He could stand it no longer. He dashed down his money, picked up the hat nearest to him, and went off in a rage. I often thought of that young man afterwards—of his chagrin during the rest of the year, when every Sunday and high day and holiday he would have to wear that ill-fitting hat as a penalty for his bad temper. These great strapping Breton men are very childish, and dislike above all things to be made to appear foolish. Towards evening, when three-quarters drunk, they are easily gulled and cheated by the gentle-faced needle-women. Without their own womenfolk they are com-

A RAINY DAY AT THE FAIR

pletely at sea, and are made to buy whatever is offered. They look so foolish, pawing one another and trying on hats at rakish angles. It is ridiculous to see an intoxicated man trying to look at his own reflection in a hand-glass. He follows it round and round, looking very serious; holds it now up and now down; and eventually buys something he does not want, paying for it out of a great purse which he solemnly draws from under his blouse.

I saw a man and a child come to buy a hat. The boy was the very image of his father—black hat, blue blouse, tight trousers and all—only that the hat was very shabby and brown and old, and had evidently seen many a ducking in the river and held many a load of nuts and cherries. His father was in the act of buying him a new one. The little pale lad smiled and looked faintly interested as hat after hat was tried on his head; but he was not overjoyed, for he knew quite well that, once home and in his mother's careful hands, that hat would be seen only on rare occasions.

Another boy who came with his father to buy a hat quite won my heart. He was a straight-limbed, fair-haired, thoroughly English-looking boy. A black felt hat was not for him—only a red tam-o'-shanter;—and he stood beaming with pride as

cap after cap was slapped on his head and as quickly whisked off again.

Women came to purchase bonnets for their babies; but, alas! instead of buying the tight-lace caps threaded with pink and blue ribbons characteristic of the country, they bought hard, round, blue-and-white sailor affairs, with mangy-looking ostrich feathers in them—atrocities enough to make the most beautiful child appear hideous.

The sun was fading fast. Horses and cows and pigs, drunken men and empty cider barrels, women with heavy baskets and dragging tired children, their pockets full of hot chestnuts—all were starting on their long walk home. When the moon rose, the square was empty.

QUIMPER

IN THE PORCH OF THE CATHEDRAL,
QUIMPER

CHAPTER V

QUIMPER

'C'était à la campagne
Près d'un certain canton de la basse Bretagne
Appelé Quimper Corentin.
On sait assez que le Destin
Adresse là les gens quand il veut qu'on enrage.
Dieu nous préserve du voyage.'

So says La Fontaine. The capital of Cornouailles is a strange mixture of the old world and the new. There the ancient spirit and the modern meet. The Odet runs through the town. On one side is a mass of rock 70 metres high, covered by a forest so dark and dense and silent that in it one might fancy one's self miles away from any town. As one wanders among the chestnuts, pines, poplars, and other trees, a sadness falls, as if from the quiet foliage in the dim obscurity. On the other side of the narrow river is a multitude of roofs, encircled by high walls and dominated by the two lofty spires of the cathedral. Gray and

full of shadows is the quiet little town, with its jumble of slanting roofs and its broken lines.

Quimper seems to have changed but little within the last six years. We arrived as the sun was setting. A warm light gilded the most ordinary objects, transforming them into things of beauty. We flashed by in the hotel omnibus, past a river resembling a canal, the Odet. The river was spanned by innumerable iron-railed bridges. The sky was of a fresh eggshell blue, with clouds of vivid orange vermilion paling in the distance to rose-pink, and shedding pink and golden reflections on the clear gray water, while a red-sailed fishing-boat floated gently at anchor. A wonderful golden light bathed the town. You felt that you could not take it all in at once, this glorious colouring—that you must rush from place to place before the light faded, and see the whole of the fine old town under these exceptional circumstances, which would most probably never occur again. You wanted to see the water, with its golden reflections, and the warm light shining on the lichen-covered walls, on the gardens sloping down to the river, on the wrought-iron gateways and low walls over which ivy and convolvulus creep, on the red-rusted bridges. You wanted

to see the cathedral—a purple-gray mass, with the sun gilding one-half of the tower to a brilliant vermilion, and leaving the other half grayer and a deeper purple than ever. You wanted to see the whole place at once, for very soon the light fades into the gray and purple of night.

My first thought on waking next morning in the 'city of fables and gables,' as Quimper is called, was to see my old convent—the dear old convent where as a child I spent such a happy year. Only twelve more months, and the nuns will be ousted from their home—those dear women whom, as the hotel proprietress said with tears in her eyes, 'fassent que du bien.' How bitterly that cruel Act rankles, and ever will rankle, in the hearts of the Breton people!

'On dit que la France est un pays libre,' said my hostess; 'c'est une drôle de liberté!'

The inhabitants of Quimper were more bitter, more rebellious, than those of any other town, for they greeted the officers with stones and gibes. And no wonder. The nuns had ever been good and generous and helpful to the people of Quimper. I remember well in the old days what a large amount of food and clothing went forth into the town from those hospitable

doors, for the Retraite du Sacré Cœur was a rich Order.

It was with a beating heart and eager anticipation that I knocked at the convent door that morning, feeling like a little child come home after the holidays. I heard the sound of bolts slipped back, and two bright eyes peeped through the grille before the door was opened by a Sister in the white habit of the Order. I knew her face in an instant, yet could not place it. Directly she spoke I remembered it was the Sister who changed our shoes and stockings whenever we returned from a walk.

I asked for the Mother Superior. She had gone to England. I asked for one of the English nuns. She also had gone. Names that had faded out of my mind returned in the atmosphere of the convent. Yes: three of the nuns I had named were still at the convent. What was my name? the Sister asked. Who was I?

I gave my name, and instantly her face lit up.

'Why, it is Mademoiselle Dorothé!' she exclaimed, raising her hands above her head in astonishment. 'Entréz, mademoiselle et madame, entréz!'

Through all these years, among all the girls who

THE VEGETABLE MARKET, QUIMPER

must have passed through the convent, she remembered me and bade me welcome. In the quiet convent so little happens that every incident is remembered and magnified and thought over.

We were taken upstairs and shown into a bare room with straight-backed chairs—a room which in my childish imagination had been a charmed and magic place, for it was here that I came always to see my mother on visiting days. We had not long to wait before, with a rustle and clinking of her cross and rosary, Mère B. appeared, a sweet woman in the black dress and pointed white coif that I knew so well. She had always been beautiful in my eyes, and she was so still, with the loveliness of a pure and saintly life shining through her large brown eyes. Her cheeks were as soft and pink as ever, and her hands, which I used to watch in admiration by the hour, were stretched out with joy to greet me.

'O la petite Dorothé!' she cried, 'quel bonheur de vous revoir! Est-ce vraiment la petite Dorothé?'

As I sat watching her while she talked to my mother, all the old thoughts and feelings came back to me with a rush. I was in some awe of her: I could not treat her as if she were an ordinary person. All the old respectful tricks and turns of

speech came back to me, though I imagined I had forgotten them. My mother was telling Mère B. of how busy I had been since I had left the convent—of the books I had written and all about them ;—but I felt as small and insignificant as the child of ten, and could only answer in monosyllables—'Oui, ma mère,' or 'Non, ma mère.'

At our request, we were shown over the convent. Many memories it brought back—some pleasant, some painful ; for a child's life never runs on one smooth level—it is ever a series of ups and downs. We were taken into the refectory. There was my place at the corner of the table, where at the first meal I sat and cried because, when asked if I would like a *tartine* instead of pudding, I was given a piece of bread-and-butter. Naturally, I had thought that *tartine* meant a tart. And there was the very same Sister laying the table, the Sister who used to look sharply at my plate to see that I ate all my fat and pieces of gristle. She remembered me perfectly. Many were the tussles, poor woman, she had had with me.

Mère B. showed us the chapel, where we used to assemble at half-past six every morning, cold and half-asleep, to say our prayers before going into the big church. Many were the beautiful addresses

the Mother Superior had read to us; many were the vows I had made to be really very good; many were the resolves I had formed to be gentle and forbearing during the day—vows and resolves only to be broken soon.

We wandered through the garden between the beds of thyme and mint and late roses, and Mère B. spoke with tears in her eyes of the time when they would have to leave their happy convent home and migrate to some more hospitable land. 'It is not for ourselves that we grieve,' she said: 'it is for our poor country—for the people who will be left without religion. Personally, we are as happy in one country as in another.'

I picked a sprig of sweet-smelling thyme as I passed, and laid it tenderly between the pages of my pocket-book. If the garden were to be desecrated and used by strangers, I must have something to remember it by.

What memories the dear old convent garden brought back to me! There was the gravelled square where we children skipped and played and sang Breton *chansons* all in a ring. There was the avenue of scanty poplars—not so scanty now—down which I often paced in rebellious mood, gazing at the walls rising high above me, longing to gain

the farther side and be in the world. Outside the convent gates was always called 'the world.' There was the little rocky shrine of the Virgin—a sweet-faced woman in a robe of blue and gold, nursing a Baby with an aureole about His head. Many a time I had thrown myself on the bench in front of that shrine in a fit of temper, and had been slowly calmed and soothed by that gentle presence, coming away a better child, with what my mother always called 'the little black monkey' gone from my back.

Very soon the convent atmosphere wraps itself about you and lulls you to rest. You feel its influence directly you enter the building. You are seized by a vague longing to stay here, just where you are, and leave the world, with its ceaseless strivings and turmoils and unrest, behind you. Yet how soon the worldly element in you would come to the fore, teasing you, tormenting you back into the toils once more! It was with a feeling of sorrow and a sensation that something was being wrenched from me that I bade good-bye to sweet Mère B. at the garden gate, with many embraces and parting injunctions not to forget the convent and my old friends.

Wherever one goes in Quimper one sees the

OUTSIDE THE CATHEDRAL, QUIMPERLE

stately cathedral, that wondrous building which, with its two excellent pyramids and gigantic portal, is said to be the most beautiful in all Brittany. It would take one days and days to realize its beauty. The doorway itself is as rich in detail as a volume of history. There are lines of sculptured angels joining hands over the porch, Breton coats of arms, and the device of Jean X.—'Malo au riche duc.' There are two windows above the doorway, crowned by a gallery, with an equestrian statue of the King of Grallon. According to tradition the cathedral must have been built on the site of the royal palace.

There are many legends about the church of St. Corentin. One is that of a man who, going on a pilgrimage, left his money with a neighbour for safety. On returning, the neighbour declared that he had never had the money, and proposed to swear to the same before the crucifix of St. Corentin. They met there, and the man swore. Instantly three drops of blood fell from the crucifix to the altar, which, the legend runs, are preserved to this day.

It is also said that there is in the fountain of Quimper a miraculous fish, which, in spite of the fact that St. Corentin cuts off half of it every day for his dinner, remains whole.

A quaint ceremony is held at the cathedral on the Feast of St. Cecile. At two o'clock the clergyman, accompanied by musicians and choir-boys, mounts a platform between the great towers, and a joyous hymn is sung there, on the nearest point to the sky in all Quimper. It is a strange sight. Scores of beggars gather round the porch of the cathedral—the halt, the lame, the blind, and the diseased—all with outstretched hats and cups.

ST. BRIEUC

BY THE SIDE OF A FARM

CHAPTER VI

ST. BRIEUC

St. Brieuc, although it has lost character somewhat during the last half-century, is still typically Breton. Its streets are narrow and cobbled, and many of its houses date from the Middle Ages. It was market-day when we arrived, and crowds of women, almost all of whom wore different caps —some of lace with wide wings, others goffered with long strings—were hurrying, baskets over their arms, in the direction of the market-place. Suddenly, while walking in these narrow, tortuous streets of St. Brieuc, I saw stretched before me, or rather below, many feet below, a green and fertile valley. It resembled a picturesque scene magically picked out of Switzerland and placed in a Breton setting. Through the valley ran a small glistening stream, a mere ribbon of water, threading its way among rocks and boulders and vivid stretches of green grass. On either side were steep hills covered with verdure, gardens, and plots

of vegetables. On the heights a railway was being cut into the solid rock—a gigantic engineering work, rather spoiling the aspect of this wooded valley full of flowers and perfumes and the sun.

We were told that there was nothing further to be seen in St. Brieuc, but that we must go to Binic, which is described in a certain guide-book as 'a very picturesque little fishing village.' This sounded inviting, and, although we had not much time to spare, we set off in a diligence with about eighteen windows, each of which rattled as we sped along at a terrific pace over the cobbles of St. Brieuc. On we went, faster and faster, rattling—out into the country, past the valley again, the beautiful valley, and many other valleys like it. Craggy purple mountains half-covered with green flew by us; and here and there was an orchard with gnarled and spreading apple-trees weighted with heavy burdens of red and golden fruit—the very soil was carpeted with red and gold. What a fertile country it is! Here, where a river flows between two mountains, how vividly green the grass! Peasant women by its banks are washing linen on the flat stones, and hanging it, all white and blue and daintily fresh, on yellow gorse bushes and dark blackberry thorns.

I have never seen blackberries such as those on the road to Binic. Tall and thick grew the bushes, absolutely black with berries, so large that they resembled bunches of grapes. Not a single Breton in all the length and breadth of Brittany will pick this ripe and delicious fruit—not a schoolboy, not a starving beggar on the wayside—for does not the bush bear the accursed thorns which pierced the Saviour's forehead? It is only when English and American children invade Brittany that the blackberries are harvested.

A diligence causes excitement in a small Breton town. It carries the mails between the villages. Whenever the inhabitants hear the horn, out they rush from their homes with letters and parcels to be given into the hands of the courier. The courier's duties, by the way, are many. Not only are the mails given into his safe keeping: he is entrusted with commissions, errands, and messages of all kinds. A housewife will ask him to buy her a bar of soap; a girl will entrust him with the matching of a ribbon; a hotel-keeper will order through him a cask of beer; and so on. The courier is busy throughout the day executing his various commissions, now in one shop, now in another; and on the return journey his cart, hung

all over with bulky packages and small,—here a chair, there a broom, here a tin of biscuits—resembles a Christmas-tree. The courier's memory must needs be good and his hand steady, for it is the custom to give him at each house as much as he likes to drink. His passengers are kept for hours shivering in the cold, becoming late for their appointments and missing their trains; but the courier cares not. He drinks wherever he stops, and at each fresh start becomes more brilliant in his driving.

At one of the villages, during the tedious wait while the driver was imbibing, I was much interested in watching a man, a little child, and a dog. The man was a loafer, but neatly and even smartly dressed, wearing a white peaked yachting cap. The child was small and sickly, with long brown hair curling round a deathly-white and rather dirty face, weak blue eyes with red rims, and an ominously scarlet mouth. Long blue-stockinged legs came from beneath a black pinafore, so thin and small that it seemed impossible that they could bear the weight of those heavy black wooden sabots. I thought that the child was a girl until the pinafore was raised, revealing tiny blue knickers and a woollen jersey.

ON THE ROAD TO BANNALEC

The boy seemed devoted to his father, and would hold his hand unnoticed for a long while, gazing into the unresponsive eyes. Now and then he would jump up feverishly and excitedly, pulling his father's coat to attract attention, and prattling all the while. The man took not the slightest notice of the child. He was glancing sharply about him. By-and-by he bent down towards his son, and I heard him whisper, 'Allez à ses messieurs la.' Without a word the boy trotted off towards the men, his hands in his pockets, and began talking to them, the father watching attentively. He returned, but was immediately sent off again with a frown and a push. Then he came back with several sous, clasped in his fist, which he held up proudly to his father. Over and over again he was sent off, and every time he came back with a few sous. Had the child appealed to me I could not have resisted him. There was something about the pathetic pale face that tugged at the heart-strings. One felt that the boy was not long for this world. His father was absolutely callous. He did not reward the lad by word or smile, although the child pulled at his coat and clamoured for attention. At last the boy gave up in despair, and, sitting down on

DÉBIT DE BOISSONS

DÉBIT de BOISSONS

the fluid was of a pale canary colour, and was flavourless. We lengthened out the meal until the carrier's cart arrived, with a full complement of passengers. It had begun to rain and hail, and the driver cheerfully assured us his was the last diligence that day. The proprietress of the *débit* had begun to rub her hands with glee at the thought of having us as customers; but I was determined that, even if I had to sit on the top of the cart, we should not stay in the terrible place an hour longer. To the surprise of the courier, and the disgust of the passengers, whose view we completely blocked, we climbed to the driver's seat and sat there. The driver, a good natured man, with consideration for his purse, shrugged his shoulders at the proprietress, and we started on our way. I have never heard such language as that which issued from the back of the cart. Many and terrible were the epithets hurled at the heads of 'ses affreuses Anglaises.'

CHURCH OF ST. MODY

PAIMPOL

CHAPTER VII

PAIMPOL

WHEREVER one travels one cannot but be impressed by the friendliness and sympathy of the people. On the day we were starting for Paimpol we found, on arriving at the station, that we had an hour to wait for our train. We happened to be feeling rather depressed that day, and at this intimation I was on the verge of tears. The porter who took our tickets cheered us up to the best of his ability. He flung open the door of the *salle d'attente* as if it had been a lordly reception-room, flourished round with his duster over mantelpiece and table and straight-backed chairs, and motioned us to be seated.

'Voilà tout ce qu'il y a de plus joli et confortable,' he said, with a smile. Perceiving that we were not impressed, he drew aside the curtains and pointed with a dirty forefinger. 'Voilà un joli petit jardin,' he exclaimed triumphantly. There, he added, we might sit if we chose. Also, he said there was a buffet close at hand. As this did

not produce enthusiasm, he observed that there was a mirror in the room, that he himself would call us in time to catch our train, and that we were altogether to consider ourselves *chez nous*. Then he bowed himself out of the room.

The scenery along the railway from Guingamp to Paimpol was beautiful. I hung my head out of the window the whole way, so anxious was I not to miss a single minute of that glorious colouring There were hills of craggy rocks, blue and purple, with pines of brilliant fresh green growing thickly up their sides. On the summit, standing dark against the sky, were older pines of a deeper green. Between the clumps of pines grew masses of mustard-yellow gorse and purple heather, in parts faded to a rich pinky-brown. Now and then there were clefts in the hills, or valleys, where the colouring was richer and deeper still, and bracken grew in abundance, pinky-brown and russet.

Paimpol itself is a fishing village, much frequented by artists, attracted by the fishing-boats with their vermilion sails, who never tire of depicting the gray stone quay, with its jumble of masts and riggings. In the *salle à manger* of the little hotel where we had luncheon the walls were literally panelled with pictures of fishing-boats

REFLECTIONS

moored to the quay. Every man sitting at that long table was an artist. This was a pleasant change from the commercial travellers who hitherto had fallen to our lot at meal-times. There was no Englishman among the artists.

The English at this time of the year in Brittany are few, though they swarm in every town and village during summer. These were Frenchmen—impressionists of the new school. It was well to know this. Otherwise one might have taken them for wild men of the woods. Such ruffianly-looking people I had never seen before. Some of them wore corduroy suits, shabby and paint-besmeared, with slovenly top-boots and large felt hats set at the back of their heads. Others affected dandyism, and parted their hair at the back, combing it towards their ears, in the latest Latin Quarter fashion. Their neckties were of the flaming tones of sunset, very large and spreading; their trousers excessively baggy. The entrance of my mother and myself caused some confusion among them, for women are very rare in Paimpol at this season. Hats flew off and neckties were straightened, while each one did his best to attend to our wants. Frenchmen are nothing if not polite. The young man sitting next to me suffered from shyness, and blushed every

time he spoke. On one occasion, airing his English, he said, 'Vill you pass ze vutter?' I passed him the butter; but he had meant water. The poor youth rivalled the peony as he descended to French and explained his mistake.

The people of Paimpol are supposed to be much addicted to smuggling. My mother and I once imagined that we had detected a flagrant act. One afternoon, walking on a narrow path above the sea, we saw three boys crouching behind a rock. They were talking very earnestly, and pointing, apparently making signals, to a little red-sailed boat. The boat changed her course, and steered straight for a small cove beneath our feet. We held our breath, expecting to witness the hiding of the loot. Suddenly, just as the little craft drew to within a yard or so of the shore, we saw from behind a rock a red and white cockade appear. There stood a gendarme! Instantly the boat went on her way once more, and the boys fell to whispering again behind the rock. After a while, to our great disgust, the gendarme walked at leisure down the path and chatted in a friendly way with the conspirators. He had been out for an afternoon stroll. Nothing really dramatic or interesting in the smuggling line seems to happen outside books.

The Paimpolais are a vigorous people. Fathers and sons dedicate their lives to the sea. With all their roughness, the people are strictly religious. The bay of Paimpol is under the protection of the Virgin, and St. Anne is patron saint. All prayers for those at sea are directed to these two saints, whose statues stand prominently in the village. At the end of every winter, before starting their dangerous life anew, the fishermen are blessed before the statues. The patron saint of the mariners gazes down with lifeless eyes on generation after generation of men—on those whose luck will be good and lives happy; on those who are destined never to return. At the opening of the fishing season there is a ceremonial procession, attended by the fathers, mothers, sisters, and *fiancées* of the fisher folk. Each man as he embarks is blessed by the priest and given a few last words of advice. Then the boats move away, a big flotilla of red-sailed fishing craft, the men singing in loud vibrating voices, as they busy themselves about their boats, the canticles of Mary, star of the sea.

A SABOT STALL

GUINGAMP

CHAPTER VIII

GUINGAMP

On the way to Guingamp we travelled second-class. In the first-class carriages one sits in solitary state, with never a chance of studying the people of the country. Half-way on our journey the train stopped, and I was amused by the excitement and perturbation of the passengers. They flew to the windows, and heaped imprecations on the guard, the engine-driver, and the railway company. As the train remained stationary for several minutes, their remarks became facetious. They inquired if *un peu de charbon* would be useful. Should they provide the porter with a blade of straw wherewith to light the engines? They even offered their services in pushing the train. One fat, red-faced commercial traveller, who, by way of being witty, declared that he was something of an engineer himself, descended the steep steps of the carriage in order to assist the officials. The French are born comedians—there is no doubt about it. They manage to make them-

selves extremely ridiculous. This man's behaviour was like that of a clown in the circus. In attempting to unlock a carriage he got in the way of everyone. The wait was long and tedious.

'Il faut coucher sur la montagne ce soir, mademoiselle,' said an old Breton who was puffing contentedly at a clay pipe in the corner of the carriage. He was very fat, and smothered up to his chin in a loose blue blouse ; but he had a classic head. It was like that of some Roman Emperor carved in bronze. His eyes were of cerulean blue. His was the head of a man born to command. There was something almost imperial in the pose and set of it. Nevertheless, this peasant lived, no doubt, in the depth of the country, probably in some hovel of a cottage, with a slovenly yellow-faced wife (women in the wilds of Brittany grow old and plain very early), dirty children, and a few pigs and cows. He had been attending a market, and he spoke with great importance of his purchases there. He descended at a minute station on the line, and I watched him as he started on his fifteen-mile drive in a ramshackle wooden cart.

We were cold and sleepy when we arrived at Guingamp, so much so that we forgot to be nervous as we crossed the line with our many

LA VIEILLESSE

bags and bandboxes. When you arrive at a station in Brittany, you are met by a bevy of men in gold-lace caps, who instantly set up a noisy chatter. You assume that they must be advertising various hotels; but it is quite impossible to distinguish. Travellers, especially the English, are rarities at this season. As a rule I carefully chose the omnibus which was cleanest, and the driver who was most respectful, in spite of many persuasions to the contrary; but on this occasion I was so limp and tired that I allowed my traps to be snatched from my hands and followed our guide meekly. It might have been the dirtiest hovel of an inn towards which we were going rapidly over the cobbled stones of the town—it was all one to me.

By great good luck we happened to chance on the Hôtel de France, where we were greeted by the *maîtresse d'hôtel*, a kindly woman, and without further delay, although it sounds somewhat *gourmande* to say so, sat down to one of the best dinners it has ever been my lot to eat. The kitchen was exactly opposite the *salle à manger*, the door of which was open for all to see within. There we could observe the chef, rotund and rosy-cheeked, in spotless white cap and apron, busy among multitudinous pots and pans which shone

like gold. His assistants, boys in butcher-blue cotton, flew hither and thither at his command, busily chopping this and whipping up that. The various dishes I do not remember distinctly; I only know that each one (I once heard an epicure speak thus) was a 'poem.' Of all that glorious menu, only the *escalopes de veau* stands out clearly, laurel-wreathed, in my memory. At the table there were the usual commercial travellers. Also there were several glum, hard-featured English-women and one man.

How is it that one dislikes one's own country-men abroad so much? It is unpatriotic to say so, but I really think that the Continental travelling portion of Britishers must be a race apart, a different species; for a more unpleasant, impolite, plain, and badly-dressed set of people it has never been my lot to meet elsewhere. The word 'English' at this rate will soon become an epithet. All the women resemble the worst type of schoolmistress, and all the men retired tradesmen.

Guingamp, by the light of day, is a pretty town, with nothing particularly imposing or attractive, although at one time it was an important city of the Duchy of Penthièvre. Its only remnant of ancient glory consists in the church of Notre

Dame de Bon Secours, a bizarre and irregular monument, dating from the fifteenth century. In the cool of the evening the environs of Guingamp are very beautiful. It is delightful to lean over some bridge spanning the dark river. Only the sound of washerwomen beating their linen, and the splash of clothes rinsed in the water, disturb the quiet.

The scenery is soft and silvery in tone, like the landscape of a Corot. Slim, bare silver birches overhang the blackened water, and on either side of the river grow long grasses, waving backwards and forwards in the wind, now purple, now gray. Down a broad yellow road troops of black and red cows are being driven, and horses with their blue wooden harness are drawing a cart laden with trunks of trees, led by a man in a blue blouse, with many an encouraging deep-voiced 'Hoop loo!' Everyone is bringing home cows, or wood, or cider apples. The sky is broad and gray, with faint purple clouds. Three dear little girls, pictures every one of them, are walking along the road, taking up the whole breadth of it, and carrying carefully between them two large round baskets full to overflowing with red and green apples. Each little maid wears on her baby head a tight

A BEGGAR

HUELGOAT

CHAPTER IX

HUELGOAT

To reach Huelgoat one must take the hotel omnibus from the railway-station, and wind up and up for about an hour. Then you reach the village. The scenery is mountainous, and quite grand for Brittany. The aspect of this country is extraordinarily varied. On the way to Huelgoat one passes little ribbon-like rivers with bridges and miniature waterfalls, and hills covered by bracken and heather. The air is bracing.

At the top of one of the hills the carriage was stopped, and a chubby boy in a red beré and sabots presented himself at the door, with the request that we should descend and see the 'goffre.' Not knowing what the 'goffre' might be, we followed our imperious guide down a precipitous path, all mud and slippery rocks, with scarcely sufficient foothold. At length we found ourselves in a dark wood, with mysterious sounds of rushing water all about us. When our eyes became accustomed to

the darkness we discovered that this proceeded from a body of water which rushed, dark-brown and angry-looking, down the rocks, and fell foaming, amber-coloured, into a great black hole. Plucking at our skirts, the child drew us to the edge, whispering mysteriously, as he pointed downwards, 'C'est la maison du diable.' A few planks had been lightly placed across the yawning abyss, and over the rude bridge the peasants passed cheerfully on their way to work or from it—woodcutters with great boughs of trees on their shoulders, and millers with sacks of flour. One shuddered to think what might happen if a sack or a bough were to fall and a man were to lose his balance. Even the child admitted that the place was *un peu dangereux*, and led us rapidly up the muddy path to the road. There we found to our astonishment that the carriage had gone on to the hotel. As my mother is not a good walker and dislikes insecure places and climbing of any kind, we felt rather hopeless; but the child assured us that the distance was not great. He seemed rather disgusted at our feebleness and hesitation. Without another word, he crossed the road and dived into a forest, leaving us to follow as best we might. Soon we were in one of the most beautiful woods

A WAYSIDE SHRINE, HUELGOAT

imaginable, among long, slim pines, of which you could see only the silver stems, unless you gazed upwards, when the vivid green of the leaves against the sky was almost too crude in its brilliancy. The path was covered with yellow pine-needles, which, in parts where the sun lit upon them through the trees, shone as pure gold. On either side grew bracken, salmon, and red, and tawny-yellow; here and there were spots of still more vivid colour, formed by toadstools which had been changed by the sun to brightest vermilion and orange. I have never seen anything more beautiful than this combination — the forest of slim purple stems, the bracken, the golden path, and, looking up, the vivid green of the trees and the blue of the sky. The child led us on through the wood, never deigning to address a word to us, his hands in his pockets, and his beré pulled over his eyes. Sometimes the path descended steeply; sometimes it was a hard pull uphill, and we were forced to stop for breath. Always the merciless child went on, until my mother almost sobbed and declared that this was not the right way to the hotel. Now and then we emerged into a more open space, where there were huge rocks and boulders half-covered with moss and ivy, some as much as

twenty feet high, like playthings of giants thrown hither and thither carelessly one on the top of the other. Over some of these, slippery and worn almost smooth, we had to cross for miles until we reached the hotel, tired.

Luncheon was a strange meal. No one spoke: there was silence all the time. About thirty people were seated at a long table, all lodgers in the hotel; but they were mute. Two young persons of the bourgeois class, out for their yearly holiday, came in rather late, and stopped on the threshold dumbfounded at sight of the silent crowd, for French people habitually make a great deal of noise and clatter at their meals. They sat opposite to us, and spent an embarrassed time.

When you visit Huelgoat you are told that the great and only thing to do is to take an excursion to St. Herbot. This all the up-to-date guide-books will tell you with *empressement*. But my advice to you is—'Don't!' Following the instructions of Messrs. Cook, we took a carriage to St. Herbot. It was a very long and uninteresting drive through sombre scenery, and when we arrived there was only a very mediocre small church to be seen. The peasants begged us to visit the grand cascade; our driver almost went down on his bended knees

to implore us to view the cascade. We would have no cascades. Cascades such as one sees in Brittany, small and insignificant affairs, bored us ; we had visited them by the score. The driver was terribly disappointed ; tears stood in his eyes. He had expected time for a drink. The peasants had anticipated liberal tips for showing us the view. They all swore in the Breton tongue. Our charioteer drove us home, at break-neck speed, over the most uneven and worst places he could discover on the road.

FISHING-BOATS, CONCARNEAU

CONCARNEAU

AT THE FOUNTAIN, CONCARNEAU

CHAPTER X

CONCARNEAU

This little town, with its high gray walls, is very important. In olden days its possession was disputed by many a valiant captain. The fortress called the 'Ville Close' has been sacrificed since then to military usage. The walls of granite, which are very thick, are pierced by three gates, doubled by bastions and flanked by machicolated towers. At each high tide the sea surrounds the fortress. Tradition tells us that on one occasion at the Fête Dieu the floods retired to make way for a religious procession of children and clergy, with golden banners and crosses, in order that they might make the complete tour of the ramparts. This fortress, a little city in itself, is joined to Concarneau by a bridge, and it is on the farther side that industry and animation are to be found. There is a fair-sized port, where hundreds of sardine-boats are moored, their red and gray nets hanging on their masts.

The activity of the port is due to the sardines, and its prosperity is dependent on the abundance of the fish. Towards the month of June the sardines arrive in great shoals on the coast of Brittany. For some time no one knew whence they came or whither they went. An approximate idea of their journeyings has now been gained. Their route, it seems, is invariable. During March and April the sardines appear on the coasts of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean; they pass through the Straits of Gibraltar, skirting Spain and Portugal; they reach France in May. In June they are to be found on the coast of Morbihan and Concarneau, in August in the Bay of Douarnénez, in September by the Isle de Batz, and later in England or in Scotland.

It is to be hoped that the fish will always abound about the coast of Concarneau. The women population is engaged in industries connected with sardines. The making and mending of the nets and the preparation and packing of the fish are in themselves a labour employing many women. When the sardines have been unloaded from the ships, they are brought to the large warehouses on the quay and submitted to the various processes of cleaning and drying. Rows of

CONCARNEAU HARBOUR

women sit at long deal tables cutting off the heads of the fish, and singing at their work. The fish are then cleaned of the salt which the fishermen threw on them, and dried in the open air on iron grills. During this time other workmen are employed in boiling oil in iron basins. The sardines, once dried, are plunged into the oil for about two minutes, sufficient to cook them, and are afterwards dried in the sun. They are then placed in small tin boxes, half-filled with oil, which are taken to be soldered. The solderers, armed with irons at white heat, hermetically close the boxes, which are then ready to be delivered to the trade. This simple process is quite modern; it was instituted at the end of the last century. The nets, which cost the fishermen thirty francs, take thirty days to make. The machine-made nets are less expensive; but it is said that they are not sufficiently elastic, and the meshes enlarged by the weight of fish do not readily close up again.

Each sardine-boat is manned by four or five men armed with an assortment of nets. The bait consists of the intestines of a certain kind of fish. The fishermen plunge their arms up to the elbow in the loathsome mixture, seizing handfuls to throw into the water. If the sardines take to

the bait, one soon sees the water on either side of the vessel white and gray with the scales of the fish. Then the men begin to draw in the nets. Two of them seize the ends and pull horizontally through the water; the others unfasten the heads of the fish caught in the meshes. The sardines are tumbled into the bottom of the boat, and sprinkled with salt.

The sardines, delicate creatures, die in the air in a few seconds. In dying they make a noise very like the cry of a mouse.

After the first haul the fishermen have some idea of the dimensions of the fish, and adjust the mesh of their nets,—for the sardines vary in size from one day to another according to the shoals on which the fishermen chance.

THE SARDINE FLEET, CONCARNEAU

MORLAIX

WATCHING FOR THE FISHING FLEET,
CONCARNEAU

CHAPTER XI

MORLAIX

'S'ILS tu te mordent, mords les,' is the proud device of the town of Morlaix, and the glorious pages of her chronicles justify the motto. Morlaix has from all time been dear to the hearts of the Dukes of Brittany for her faithfulness, which neither reverse nor failure has ever altered. Even during the Wars of the Succession, after the most terrible calamities, she still maintained a stout heart and a bold front. She espoused the cause of Charles of Blois, which cost her the lives of fifty of her finest men, whom the Duc de Monfort hanged under false pretences.

Morlaix is a quaint little town—all gables, pointed roofs, and projecting windows. There are streets so narrow that in perspective the roofs appear to meet overhead. They are of wonderful colours. You will see white houses with chocolate woodwork, and yellow houses, stained by time, with projecting windows. In some cases there are

small shops on the ground-floor. The town seems to be built in terraces, to which one mounts by steps with iron railings. You are for ever climbing, either up or down, in Morlaix ; and the only footgear that seems to be at all appropriate to its roughly cobbled streets is the thick wooden nail-studded sabot of the Breton.

Most of the houses on the outskirts have gardens on the tops of the roofs ; it is odd, when looking up a street, to see scarlet geraniums nodding over the gray stonework, and, sometimes, vines meeting in a green tracery above your head.

There are in Morlaix whole streets in which every house has a pointed roof, where all the slates are gray and scaly, and each story projects over another, the last one projecting farthest, with, on the ground-floor, either a clothier's shop or a *quincaillerie* bright with gleaming pots and pans and blue enamelled buckets. This lowest story has always large wooden painted shutters flung back.

The houses are unlike those of any other town I have seen in Brittany. There are always about five solid square rafters under each story, and each rafter is carved at the end into some grotesque little image or flower. There is much painted wood-

work about the windows, and criss-cross beams sometimes run down the whole length of the house. There are still many strange old blackened edifices, sculptured from top to bottom, which have remained intact during four centuries with a sombre obstinacy. At the angles you often see grotesque figures of biniou-players, arabesques, and leaves, varied in the most bizarre manner, and so delicately and beautifully executed that they would form material for six 'Musées de Cluny.' These vast high houses are very dirty, crumbling like old cheeses, and almost as multitudinously alive. Each story is separated by massive beams, carved in a profusion of ornaments; each window has small leaded panes. The rest of the façade is carved with lozenge-shaped slates.

Morlaix, of course, has her Maison de la Reine Anne, of which she is proud. It is a characteristic house, with straight powerful lines. The door, greenish-black, is of fluted wood. The whole building is covered with an infinity of detail—ludicrous faces, statuettes, and carved figures of saints. Inside it has almost no decoration. The white walls rise to the top of the house plain and unadorned, save for a very elaborate staircase of rich chestnut-coloured wood very beautifully

carved, with bridges, branching off from right to left, leading to the various apartments. At the top is a sculptured figure—either of the patron saint of the house or of some saint especially beloved in Brittany.

The town is a mixture of antiquity and modernity. Though her houses and streets are old, Morlaix possesses the most modern of viaducts, 284 metres long, giving an extraordinary aspect to the place. When you arrive at night you see the town glistening with myriads of lights, so far below that it seems incredible. You do not realize that the railway is built upon a viaduct: it seems as if you were suspended in mid-air.

When we arrived at Morlaix, a man with a carriage and four horses offered to drive us to Huelgoat for a very modest sum; but I vowed that all the king's horses and all the king's men would not tear me away that day. There was much to be seen. One never wearies of wandering through the streets of this fine old town, gazing up at the houses, and losing one's way among the ancient and dark by-ways. Morlaix is in a remarkable state of preservation. The houses generally do not suggest ruin or decay. The

MEDIÆVAL HOUSE AT MORLAIX

town seems to have everlasting youth. This is principally owing to the great love of the people for art and the picturesque, which has led them to renovate and rebuild constantly. For this reason, some of the structures are of great archæological value.

The religious edifices are few. Indeed, I saw only the little church of St. Milaine, its belfry dwarfed by the prodigious height of the viaduct. It is a gem of architecture. The stonework is carved to resemble lace, and both inside and out the building is in the pure Gothic style.

Storms are very sudden in Morlaix. Sometimes on a sunny day, when all the world is out of doors, the wind will rise, knocking down the tailors' dummies and scattering the tam-o'-shanters hanging outside the clothiers'. Then comes rain in torrents. How the peasants scuttle! What a clatter of wooden-shod feet over the cobbles as they run for shelter! Umbrellas appear like mushrooms on a midsummer-night. Once I saw some old women in the open square with baskets of lace and crotchet-work and bundles of clothes stretched out for sale. When the rain began they fell into a great fright, and strove to cover their wares with old sacks, baskets, umbrellas—anything that was

ready to hand. I felt inclined to run out of the hotel and help. As suddenly as the storm had risen, the sun came out, clear and radiant. I never knew the air to be so invigorating and bright anywhere in Brittany as it is in Morlaix.

PONT-AVEN

OUTSIDE THE SMITHY, PONT-AVEN

CHAPTER XII

PONT-AVEN

PONT-AVEN is associated with agreeable memories. This village in the South of Finistère draws men and women from all over Europe, summer after summer. Many of them stay there throughout the winter, content to be shut off from the world, allowing the sweet and gentle lassitude of the place to lull their cares and troubles. Is it climatic—this soothing influence—or is it the outcome of a spell woven over beautiful Pont-Aven by some good-natured fairy long ago? I have often wondered. Certain it is that intelligent men, many of them painters, have been content to spend years in Pont-Aven. Some time ago Mother and Father, touring in Brittany, came to this delightful spot, and determined to spend three weeks there. They stayed three years.

All my life I have heard stories of this wonderful place, and of their first visit. It was when my father had only just begun his career as a painter.

The experience, he says, was a great education. There he found himself in an amazing nest of French and American painters, all the newer lights of the French school. He was free to work at whatever he liked, yet with unlimited chances of widening, by daily argument, his knowledge of technical problems. For the three years that he remained on this battlefield of creeds conflicts of opinion raged constantly. Everyone was frantically devoted to one or another of the dominating principles of the moderns. There was a bevy of schools there.

One, called the Stripists, painted in stripes, with vivid colour as nearly prismatic as possible, all the scenery around. Then, there were the Dottists, who painted in a series of dots. There were also the Spottists — a sect of the Dottists, whose differentiation was too subtle to be understood. Men there were who had a theory that you must ruin your digestion before you could paint a masterpiece. No physically healthy person, they declared, could hope to do fine work. They used to try to bring about indigestion.

One man, celebrated for his painting of pure saints with blue dresses, over which Paris would go crazy, never attempted to paint a saint until

he had drunk three glasses of absinthe and bathed his face in ether. Another decided that he was going to have, in Paris, an exhibition of merry-go-rounds which should startle France. He had a theory that the only way to get at the soul of a thing was to paint when drunk. He maintained that the merry-go-rounds whirled faster then. One day my father went to his studio. He was dazed. He did not know whether he was standing on his head or his heels. It was impossible to see 'Black Bess' or any of the pet horses he knew so well. The pictures were one giddy whirl.

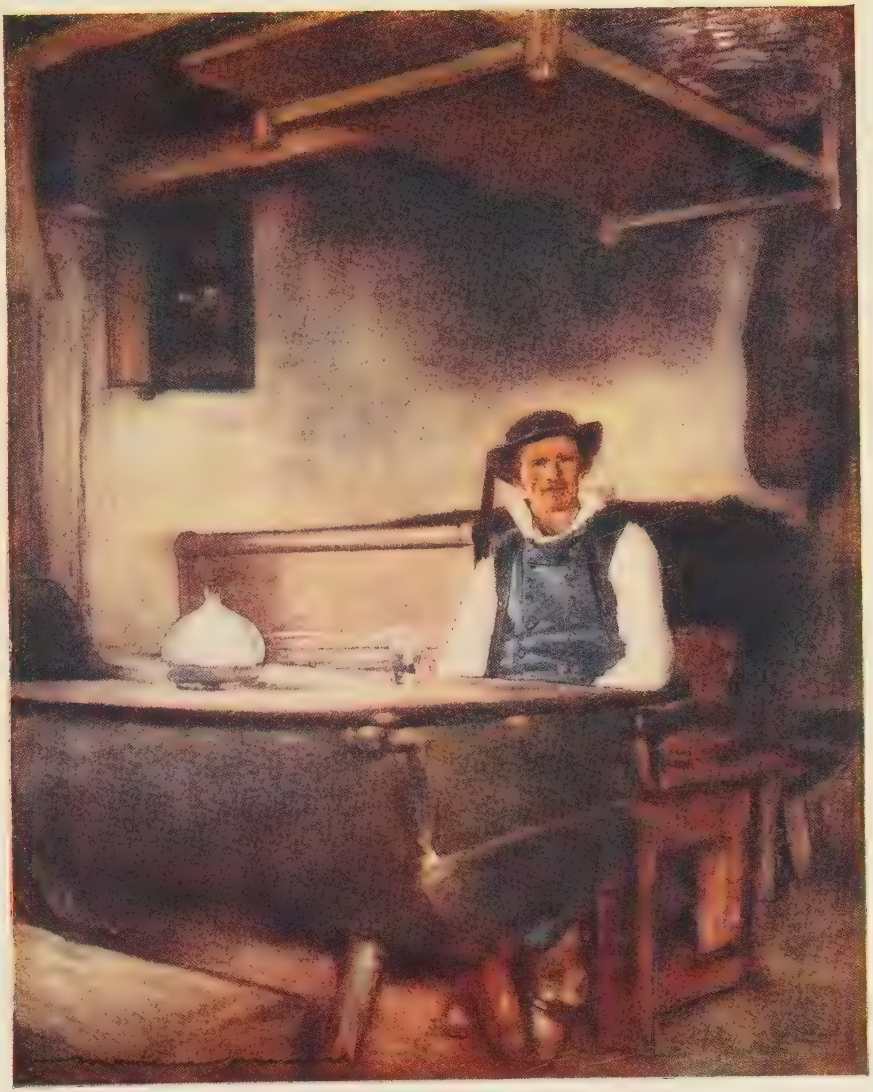
Then, there was the Bitumen school, a group of artists who never painted anything but white sun-lit houses with bitumen shadows. A year or two afterwards a terrible thing invariably happened. Without any warning whatsoever, the pictures would suddenly slide from off their canvases to the floor. The bitumen had melted.

The Primitives afforded joy. Their distinctive mark was a walking-stick, carved by a New Zealand Maori, which they carried about with them. It gave them inspiration. So powerful was the influence of these sticks that even the head of a Breton peasant assumed the rugged aspect of the primitive carvings in their paintings.

The most enthusiastic disciple of the sect was a youth who was continually receiving marvellous inspirations. Once, after having shut himself up for three days, he appeared looking haggard and ravenous. Without a word, he sat down heavily near a table, called for absinthe, and, groaning, dropped his head in his hands, and murmured, 'Ah, me! Ah, me!' All beholders were in a fever to know what the mystery was. After some minutes of dead silence the young man rose majestically from his chair, stretched forth one arm, and, with a far-away look in his eyes, said, 'Friends, last night, when you were all asleep, a beautiful creature came to me in spirit form, and taught me the secret of drawing; and I drew this.' Then he brought out a picture. It was far above his usual style, and the more credulous envied his good fortune. Some weeks afterwards, however, it was discovered by a painter with detective instincts that the marvellous vision was in reality a *chambre au clair*—that is to say, a prism through which objects are reflected on paper, enabling one to trace them with great facility.

Such are the extraordinary people among whom Mother and Father found themselves on their first visit to Pont-Aven—geniuses some of them, mere

IN AN AUBERGE, PONT-AVEN



daubers others, all of them strange and rough and weird. More like wild beasts they looked than human beings, Mother told me; for very few women came to Pont-Aven in the early days, and those were Bohemians. The artists allowed their hair and beards to grow long. Day after day they wore the same old paint-stained suits of corduroys, battered wide-brimmed hats, loose flannel shirts, and coarse wooden sabots stuffed with straw.

Mother, who was very young at the time, has often told me that she will never forget their arrival at the little Hôtel Gleanec. They were shown into a *salle à manger*, where rough men sat on either side of a long table, serving themselves out of a common dish, and dipping great slices of bread into their plates.

Mother was received with great courtesy by them. She found it very amusing to watch the gradual change in their appearance day by day—the donning of linen collars and cuffs and the general smartening up. Many of the men who were then struggling with the alphabet of art have reached the highest rungs of the ladder of fame, and their names have become almost household words; others have sunk into oblivion, and are still amateurs.

The chief hotel in the village was the Hôtel des Voyageurs, to which Mother and Father soon migrated. It was kept by a wonderful woman, called Julia. Originally a peasant girl, she had by untiring energy become the proprietress of the great establishment. Her fame as hostess and manager was bruited all over France. Everyone seemed to know of Julia, and year after year artists and their families came back regularly to stay with her. She is a woman with a strong individuality. She gathered a large custom among artists, who flocked to the Hôtel des Voyageurs as much because of the charm of Mdlle. Julia, and the comfort of her house, as for the beauty of the scenery.

There was a delightful intimacy among the guests, most of whom were very intelligent. Mdlle. Julia took a sincere interest in the career of each. All went to her with their troubles and their joys, certain of sympathy and encouragement. Many are the young struggling painters she has helped substantially, often allowing them to live on in the hotel for next to nothing. Many are the unpaid bills of long standing on the books of this generous woman. I fear that she has never made the hotel pay very well, for the elaborate menu and good accommodation are out of all proportion to

her charges. A strong woman is Mdlle. Julia. She has been known to lift a full-grown man and carry him out of doors, landing him ignominiously in the mud.

There was one man, a retired military officer, whom no one else could manage. He had come to stay in Pont-Aven because he could live there for a few francs a day and drink the rest. He suffered from hallucinations, and took great pleasure in chasing timid artists over the countryside, challenging them to duels, and insulting them in every way possible. He was the terror of the village. He had a house on the quay, and early one morning when the snow was thick upon the ground, just because a small vessel came into the river and began blowing a trumpet, or making a noise of some kind, he sprang out of bed in a towering rage, rushed in his nightshirt into the street, and began sharpening his sword on a rock, shouting to the ship's captain to come out and be killed if he dared. The captain did not dare. The only person of whom this extraordinary person stood in awe was Mdlle. Julia. Her he would obey without a murmur. No one knew why. Perhaps there had been some contest between them. At any rate, they understood each other.

The friends of Mdlle. Julia ranged from the Mayor of the town to Batiste, the butcher, who sat outside his door all day and watched her every movement.

'If I want to remember where I have been, and what I did at a certain hour, I have only to ask Batiste,' she was wont to say.

All the artists worshipped the ground she trod upon; and well they might, for they would never have a better friend than she. Her *salle à manger* and *grand salon* were panelled with pictures, some of which are very valuable to-day. Tender-hearted she was, and strong-minded, with no respect for persons. Mother told me that once when my brother and sister, babies of three and four years old, were posing for Father on the beach with only their linen sunbonnets on, their limbs were somewhat sunburnt and blistered. When they returned to the hotel, Mdlle. Julia applied sweet oil and cold cream to the tender skin, and rated my parents soundly between her tears of compassion for the little ones. It was of no use explaining that it was in the cause of art. She bade them in unmeasured terms to send art to the Devil, and scolded them as if they were children. I doubt not she would have reprimanded the King of England with as little compunction.

A SAND-CART ON THE QUAY, PONT-AVEN

Mdlle. Julia made the reputation of Pont-Aven by her own overpowering individuality. If she went to Paris or elsewhither for a few days, everyone in the village felt her absence. Things were not the same. Pont-Aven seemed momentarily to have lost its charm. The meals were badly cooked and worse served; the *bonnes* were neglectful. All missed the ringing laugh and cheery presence of Julia. How soon one knew when she had returned! What a flutter there was among the *bonnes!* What a commotion! How everyone flew hither and thither at her command! She seemed to fill the hotel with her presence.

I went to Pont-Aven when I was ten years old, and I remember well how Mdlle. Julia came to meet us, driving twenty miles through the deep snow. What happy days those were in the dear little village! We lived as wild things, and enjoyed life to the full. M. Grenier, the schoolmaster, acted as tutor to us. He was lenient. We spent our time mainly in rambling over the countryside, making chocolate in Mdlle. Julia's wood, bird-nesting, and apple-stealing. M. Grenier taught us to row, and we learnt all the various intricate currents and dangerous sandbanks so thoroughly

that after a time we could almost have steered through that complicated river blindfold. We learnt how to make boats out of wood, and how to carve our names in a professional manner on trees. We became acquainted with a large selection of Breton ballads and a good deal of rough botany. More advanced lessons have faded from my mind. Of actual book-learning we accomplished very little. Many a time M. Grenier pulled himself together, brought us new copybooks, fine pens, his French grammar and readers, and settled us down in the salon to work; but gradually the task would pall on both master and scholars, and before the morning was half over we would be out in the fields and woods again, 'just for a breath of fresh air.'

Children have the power of making themselves at home in a foreign country. Within a week my brother and I knew everyone in the village. We became acquainted with all their family affairs and troubles. In many households we were welcome at any time of the day. There was the sabot-maker, whom we never tired of watching as he cleverly and rapidly transformed a square block of wood into a rounded, shapely sabot. He was always busy, and sometimes turned out a dozen

pairs in a day. To my great joy, he presented me with a beautiful little pair, which I wore painfully, but with much pride. Although when you become accustomed to them sabots are comfortable and sensible gear, at first they are extremely awkward. Of course, you can kick them off before you enter a house, and run about in the soft woollen *chausson* with a leather sole which is always worn underneath. Round the hotel doorway there is always a collection of sabots awaiting their owners. In a country such as Brittany, where it rains a good deal, and the roads are often deep in mud, they are the only possible wear. The sabot is a product of evolution. In that respect it is like the hansom cab which is a thing of beauty simply because it has been thought out with regard to its usefulness and comfort alone.

Batiste, the butcher, was a great friend of ours. With morbid fascination we witnessed his slaughter of pigs and cows. Then, soon we knew where to get the best *crêpes*. These are pancakes of a kind, so thin that you can see through them, made on a round piece of metal over a blazing fire. Eaten hot, with plenty of butter and sugar, they are equal to anything in our English cookery. There was one particular old lady living down by

the bridge who made *crêpes*. We saw her mixing the ingredients, mostly flour and water, and spreading the dough over the round piece of metal. It became hard in an instant, and curled up brown and crisp, as thin as a lace handkerchief. Likewise, we knew where to buy bowls of milk thick with cream for one sou. We had to tramp over several fields and to scale several fences before we found ourselves in the kitchen of a large farm, where the housewife was busy pouring milk into large copper vessels. Seated at the polished mahogany table, we drank from dainty blue bowls.

I went back to Pont-Aven recently, and found it very little changed. We travelled by diligence from Concarneau; but, as the conveyance left only once a day, we had several hours to while away. The Concarneau and Pont-Aven diligence is quaint and primitive, devoid of springs, and fitted with extremely narrow and hard seats. We passed through villages in which every house seemed to be either a *buvette* or a *débit de boisson*. At these our driver—a man in a blue blouse and a black felt hat—had to deliver endless parcels, for which he dived continually under the seat on which we were sitting. For discharging each commission he

PLAYING ON THE 'PLACE,' PONT-AVEN

received several glasses of cider and wine. He stopped at every place to drink and talk with the host, quite oblivious of his passengers. With every mile he became more uproarious.

Our only travelling companion was an old woman in the costume of the country, with a yellow and wrinkled face. On her arm she carried a large basket and a loaf of bread two yards long. Ruthlessly she trod on our toes with her thick black sabots in getting in. Although I helped her with her basket and her bread, she never volunteered a word of thanks, but merely snatched them from my hands. Many Bretons are scarcely of higher intelligence than the live-stock of the farms. They live in the depths of the country with their animals, sleeping in the same room with them, rarely leaving their own few acres of ground. The women work as hard as the men, digging in the fields and toiling in the forests from early morning until night.

At one of the villages where the diligence stopped, a blacksmith, a young giant, handsome, dark, came out from the smithy with his dog, which he was sending to some gentleman with hunting proclivities in Pont-Aven. The animal—what is called a *chien de la chasse*—was attached

by a long chain to the step, and the diligence started off. The blacksmith stood in the door of his smithy, and watched the dog disappear with wistful eyes. The Bretons have a soft spot in their hearts for animals. The dog itself was the picture of misery. His moans and howls wrung one's heart. I never saw an animal more wily. He tried every conceivable method of slipping his collar. He pulled at the chain, and wriggled from one side to another. Once he contrived to work his ear under the collar, and my fingers itched to help him. Had the truant escaped, I could not have informed the driver. Strange that one's sympathies are always with the weakest! In novels, an escaping convict, no matter how terrible his guilt, always has my sympathy, and I am hostile to the pursuing warder.

As we drew near to Pont-Aven the scenery became more and more beautiful. On either side of the road stretched miles and miles of brilliant mustard-yellow gorse, mingled with patches of dried reddish bracken, and bordered by rows of blue-green pines. Here and there one saw great rocks half-covered with the velvet-green of mosses thrown hither and thither in happy disorder. Sometimes ivy takes root in the crevices of the rocks

where a little earth has gathered, and creeps closely round about them, as if anxious to convey life and warmth to the cold stone. The sun, like a red ball, was setting behind the hills, leaving the sky flecked with clouds of the palest mauves and pinks, resembling the fine piece of marbling one sometimes sees inside the covers of modern well-bound books. Now and then we passed a little ruined chapel — consecrated, no doubt, to some very ancient saint (it was impossible to make out the name), a saint whose cult was evidently lost, for the little shrine was tumbling to ruins. We saw by the wayside little niches sheltering sacred fountains, the waters of which cure certain diseases; and passed peasants on the roadside, sometimes on horseback, sometimes walking — large, well-proportioned, fine-featured men of proud bearing. In Brittany the poorest peasant is a free and independent man. He salutes you out of politeness and good nature; but he does not cringe as if recognising himself to be lower in the social scale. The Breton, howsoever poor, is no less dignified under his blue blouse than his ancestors were under their steel armour.

A long straight road leads from Concarneau to Pont-Aven, and at the end of it lies the pretty

village among hills of woods and of rocks bathed in a light mist. One could almost imagine that it was a Swiss village in miniature. By the time we arrived it was night. We could only discern clean white houses on either side, and water rushing under a bridge over which we passed. The Hôtel des Voyageurs looked much the same as ever, except that over the way a large building had been added to the *annexe*. To our great disappointment, we discovered that Mdlle. Julia had gone to Paris; but we recognised several of the *bonnes* and a hoary veteran called Joseph, who had been in Julia's service for over twenty years.

Gladly I rushed out next morning. There is nothing more delightful than to visit a place where one has been happy for years as a child, especially such a place as Pont-Aven, which changes little. My first thought was to see the Bois d'Amour. I found it quite unchanged. To be sure, I had some difficulty in finding the old pathway which led to the wood, so many strange houses and roadways had been built since we were there; but at length we found it—that old steep path with the high walls on either side, on which the blackberries grew in profusion. There are two paths in the forest—one, low down, which leads

ON THE QUAY AT PONT-AVEN

by the stream, and the other above, carpeted with silver leaves. A wonderful wood it is—a joyous harmony in green and gold. Giant chestnuts fill the air with their perfumed leaves, forming an inextricable lattice-work overhead, one branch entwining with the other, the golden rays of the sun filtering through. The ground is carpeted with silver and salmon leaves left from last autumn; the pines shed thousands of brown cones, and streams of resin flow down their trunks. It is well-named the Bois d'Amour. Below runs a little stream. Now it foams and bounds, beating itself against a series of obstacles; now it flows calmly, as if taking breath, clear, silver, and limpid, past little green islands covered with flowers, and into bays dark with the black mud beneath. Low-growing trees and bushes flourish on the banks, some throwing themselves across the stream as barricades, over which the laughing water bounds and leaps unheedingly, scattering diamonds and topaz in the sunlight. Everything in the Bois d'Amour seems to join in the joyous song of Nature. The little stream sings; the trees murmur and rustle in the wind; and the big black mill-wheel, glistening with crystal drops, makes music with the water.

By the riverside, women are washing their clothes on square slabs of stone, which stretch across the water. It was on these stepping-stones, I remember, that my brother and I lost our shoes and stockings. At one place the stream is hidden from sight by thick bushes, and you find yourself in a narrow green lane, a green alley, walled on either side and roofed overhead by masses of trees and bushes, through which the sun filters occasionally in golden patches. Whenever I walk down that lane, I think of the song that my bonne Marie taught me there one day; it comes back as freshly now as if it had been but yesterday. The refrain begins, 'Et mon cœur vol, vol et vol, et vol, vers les cieux.'

One meets the river constantly during this walk, and every mile or so you come across a little black mill. The mills in Pont-Aven are endless, and this saying is an old one: 'Pont-Aven ville de renom, quatorze moulins, quinze maisons.'

Picturesque little mills they are. The jet-black wheels form a delightful contrast to the vivid green round about; and small bridges of stones, loosely put together and moss-grown here and there, cross the river at intervals.

I love this rough, wild country. How variable

ON THE STEPS OF THE MILL HOUSE,
PONT-AVEN

it is! You may sit in a wood with the stream at your feet, and all about you will be great hills half-covered with gorse and bracken, and here and there huge blocks of granite, which seem ready to fall any moment.

The Bois d'Amour is a happy hunting-ground of artists. This particular view of the mill at which I gazed so long has been a stock-subject with painters for many years. You never pass without seeing at least one or two men with canvases spread and easels erected, vainly trying to reproduce the beautiful scene. Artists are plentiful in this country. Wherever you may wander within a radius of fifteen miles, you cannot stop at some attractive prospect without hearing an impatient cough behind you, and, turning, find yourself obstructing the view of a person in corduroys and flannel shirt, with a large felt hat, working, pipe aglow, at an enormous canvas. The artists, who are mostly English, are thought very little of by the people about. I once heard a commercial traveller talking of Pont-Aven.

'Pshaw!' he said, 'they are all English and Americans there. Everything is done for the English. At the Hôtel des Voyageurs even the cuisine is English. It is unbearable! At the table

the men wear clothes of inconceivable colour and cut. They talk without gestures, very quickly and loudly, and they eat enormously. The young *mees* are flat-faced, with long chins, white eyelashes, and fair hair. Many are taciturn, morose, and dreamy. Occasionally they make jokes, but without energy. They mostly eat without interruption.'

This is the French view, and it is natural. Pont-Aven does not have the right atmosphere for the Frenchman: the Bretons and the English are supreme.

Nothing is more delightful than to spend a summer there. You find yourself in a colony of intelligent men, many of them very clever, as well as pretty young English and American girls, and University students on 'cramming' tours. Picnics and river-parties are organized by the inimitable Mdlle. Julia every day during the summer, and in the evening there is always dancing in the big salon. The hotel is full to overflowing from garret to cellar. Within the last few years Mdlle. Julia has opened another hotel at Porte Manec, by the sea, to which the visitors may transfer themselves whenever they choose, going either by river or by Mdlle. Julia's own omnibus.

It is built on the same lines as Mme. Bernhardt's house at Belle Isle, and is situated on a breezy promontory.

The river lies between Pont-Aven and Porte Manec, which is at the mouth of the sea. How beautiful this river is—the dear old browny-gray, moleskin-coloured river, edged with great rocks on which the seaweed clings! On the banks are stretches of gray-green grass bordered by holly-bushes. The scenery changes constantly. Sometimes it is rugged and rocky, now sloping up, now down, now covered with green gorse or a sprinkling of bushes, now with a wilderness of trees. Here and there you will see a cleft in the mountain-side, a little leafy dell which one might fancy the abode of fairies. Silver streams trickle musically over the bare brown rocks, and large red toadstools grow in profusion, the silver cobwebs sparkling with dew in the gorse.

It is delightful in the marvellous autumn weather to take the narrow river-path winding in and out of the very twisty Aven, and wander onwards to your heart's content, with the steep hillside at the back of you and the river running at your feet. You feel as if you could walk on for ever over this mountainous ground, where the

heather grows in great purple bunches among huge granite rocks, which, they say, were placed there by the Druids. Down below flows the river —a mere silver ribbon now, in wastes of pinky-purple mud, for it is ebb tide; and now and then you see the battered hulk of a boat lying on its side in the mud. On the hill are lines of fir-trees standing black and straight against the horizon.

Night falls in a bluish haze on the hills and on the river, confusing the outline of things. At the foot of the mountains it is almost dark. Through the open windows and doors of the cottages as one passes one can see groups round the tables under the yellow light of candles. One smells the good soup which is cooking; the noise of spoons and plates mingles with the voices of the people. Pewter and brass gleam from the walls. It is a picture worthy of Rembrandt. The end of the room is hidden in smoky shadow, now and then lit up by a flame escaping from the fireplace, showing an old woman knitting in the ingle-nook, and an old white-haired peasant drinking cider out of a blue mug. It is strange to think of these people living in their humble homes year after year—a happy little people who have no history.

Not far from Pont-Aven is the ruined château of

THE BRIDGE, PONT-AVEN

Rustephan. One approaches it through a wood of silver birches, under great old trees; cherry-trees and apple-trees remain in what must once have been a flourishing orchard. The castle itself has fallen to decay. The wall which joined the two towers has broken down, and the steps of the grand spiral staircase, up which we used to climb, have crumbled; only the main column, built of granite sparkling with silver particles, which will not fall for many a day, stands stout and sturdy. One of the stately old doorways remains; but it is only that which leads to the castle keep—the main entrance must have fallen with the walls centuries ago. Bits of the old dining-hall are still to be seen—a huge fireplace, arch-shaped, and a little shrine-like stone erection in the wall, worn smooth in parts; one can imagine that it was once a sink for washing dishes in.

It is a drowsy morning; the sun shines hotly on the back of the neck; and as one sits on a mound of earth in the middle of what was once the dining-hall, one cannot resist dreaming of the romantic history of Geneviève de Rustephan, the beautiful lady who lived here long ago. Up in one of the great rounded towers spotted with orange lichen and encircled with ivy is a room which must have

been her bedchamber. An ancient chimney-stack rears itself tall and stately, and where once gray smoke curled and wreathed, proceeding from the well-regulated kitchen, long feathery grasses grow. All round the castle, in what must have been the pleasure-gardens, the smooth lawns and the bowling-green, my lady's rose-garden, etc., are now mounds of earth, covered with straggling grass, bracken, and blackberry-bushes, and loose typical Breton stone walls enclosing fields. Horrible to relate, in the lordly dining-hall, where once the dainty Geneviève sat, is a fat pig, nozzling in the earth.

Naturally, Rustephan is haunted. If anyone were brave enough to penetrate the large hall towards midnight (so the peasants say), a terrible spectacle would be met—a bier covered with a white cloth carried by priests bearing lighted tapers. On clear moonlight nights, say the ancients, on the crumbling old terrace, a beautiful girl is to be seen, pale-faced, and dressed in green satin flowered with gold, singing sad songs, sobbing and crying. On one occasion the peasants were dancing on the green turf in front of the towers, and in the middle of the most animated part of the feast there appeared behind the crossbars of a

THE VILLAGE FORGE, PONT-AVEN

window an old priest with shaven head and eyes as brilliant as diamonds. Terrified, the men and the girls fled, and never again danced in these haunted regions.

One feels miserable on leaving Pont-Aven. It seems as if you had been in a quiet and beautiful backwater for a time, and were suddenly going out into the glare and the noise and the flaunting airs of a fashionable regatta. I can describe the sensation in no other way. There is something in the air of Pont-Aven that makes it like no other place in the world.

QUIMPERLÉ.

THE VILLAGE COBBLER

CHAPTER XIII

QUIMPERLÉ

Quimperlé is known as the Arcadia of Basse Bretagne, and certainly the name is well deserved. I have never seen a town so full of trees and trailing plants and gardens. Every wall is green with moss and gay with masses of convolvulus and nasturtium. Flowers grow rampant in Quimperlé, and overrun their boundaries. Every window-sill has its row of pink ivy-leafed geraniums, climbing down and over the gray stone wall beneath ; every wall has its wreaths of trailing flowers.

There are flights of steps everywhere—favourite caprices of the primitive architects—divided in the middle by iron railings. Up these steps all the housewives must go to reach the market. On either side the houses crowd, one above the other, with their steep garden walls, sometimes intercepted by iron gateways, and sometimes covered by blood-red leaves and yellowing vines. Some are houses of the Middle Ages, and some of the Renais-

sance period, with sculptured porches and panes of bottle-glass ; a few have terraces at the end of the gardens, over which clematis climbs. Here and there the sun lights up a corner of a façade, or shines on the emerald leaves, making them scintillate. Down the steps a girl in white-winged cap and snowy apron, with pink ribbon at her neck, carrying a large black two-handled basket, is coming on her way from market.

Having scaled this long flight of steps, you find yourself face to face with the old Gothic church of St. Michael, a grayish-pink building with one great square tower and four turrets. The porch is sculptured in a rich profusion of graceful details. Here and there yellow moss grows, and there are clusters of fern in the niches. Inside, the church was suffused with a purple light shed by the sun through the stained-glass windows ; the ceiling was of infinite blue. Everything was transformed by the strange purple light. The beautiful carving round the walls, the host of straight-backed praying-chairs, and even the green curtain of the confessional boxes, were changed to royal purple. Only the altar, with its snowy-white cloths and red and gold ornaments, retained its colour. Jutting forth from the church of St. Michael are arms or

branches connecting it with the village, as if it were some mother bird protecting the young ones beneath her wings. Under these wings the houses of the village cluster.

It is five o'clock in the afternoon, the sociable hour, when people sit outside their cottage doors, knitting, gossiping, watching the children play, and eating the evening meal. Most of the children, who are many, are very nearly of the same age. Clusters of fair curly heads are seen in the road. The youngest, the baby, is generally held by some old woman, probably the grandmother, who has a shrivelled yellow face—a very tender guardian.

Over the doorways of the shops hang branches of withered mistletoe. Through the long low windows, which have broad sills, you catch a glimpse of rows and rows of bottles. These are wine-shops —no rarities in a Breton village. Another shop evidently belonged to the church at one time. It still possesses a rounded ecclesiastical doorway, built of solid blocks of stone, and the walls, which were white originally, are stained green with age. The windows, as high as your waist from the ground, have broad stone sills, on which are arranged carrots and onions, coloured sweets in bottles, and packets of tobacco. This shop evi-

dently supplies everything that a human being can desire. Above it you read: 'Café on sert a boire et a manger.'

While we were in Quimperlé there were two musicians making a round of the town. One, with a swarthy face, was blind, and sang a weird song in a minor key, beating a triangle. The other, who looked an Italian, was raggedly dressed in an old fur coat and a faded felt hat. His musical performance was a veritable gymnastic feat. In his hands he held a large concertina, which he played most cleverly; at his back was a drum with automatic sticks and clappers, which he worked with his feet. It was the kind of music one hears at fairs. Wherever we went we heard it, sometimes so near that we could catch the tune, sometimes at a distance, when only the dull boom of the drum was distinguishable.

Whenever I think of Quimperlé this strange music and the spectacle of those two picturesque figures come back to memory. The men are well known in Brittany. They spend their lives travelling from place to place, earning a hard livelihood. When I was at school in Quimper I used to hear the same tune played by the same men outside the convent walls.

THE BLIND PIPER

Quimperlé is a sleepy place, changing very little with the years. In spite of the up-to-date railway-station, moss still grows between the pavings of the streets. The houses have still their picturesque wooden gables; the gardens are laden with fruit-trees; the hills are rich in colour. Flowers that love the damp grow luxuriantly. It is an arcadian country. The place is hostile to work. In this tranquil town, almost voluptuous in its richness of colour and balminess of atmosphere, you lose yourself in laziness. There is not a discordant note, nothing to shock the eye or grate on the senses. Far from the noise of Paris, the stuffy air of the boulevards, the never-ending rattle of the fiacres, and the rasping cries of the camelot, you forget the seething world outside.

In the Rue du Château, the aristocratic quarter, are many spacious domains with doorways surmounted by coats of arms and coronets. Most of them have closed shutters, their masters having disappeared, alienated for ever by the Revolution; but a few great families have returned to their homes. One sees many women about the church, grave and sad and prayerful, who still wear black, clinging to God, the saints, and the priests, as to the only living souvenirs of better times.

In no other place in Finistère was the Revolution so sudden and so terrible as in this little town, and nowhere were the nobility so many and powerful. This old Rue du Château must have rung with furious cries on the day when the federators returned from the fête of the Champs de Mars after the abolition of all titles and the people took the law into their own hands. The Bretons are slow to anger; but when roused they are extremely violent. They not only attacked the living—the nobles in their seignorial hotels—but also they went to the tombs and mutilated the dead with sabre cuts.

In Quimperlé the painter finds pictures at every turn. For example, there are clear sinuous streams crossed by many bridges, not unlike by-canals in Venice. As you look up the river the bank is a jumble of sloping roofs, protruding balconies, single-arched bridges, trees, and clumps of greenery. The houses on either side, gray and turreted, bathe their foundations in the stream. Some have steep garden walls, velvety with green and yellow moss and lichen; others have terraces and jutting stone balconies, almost smothered by trailing vines and clematis, drooping over the gray water. The stream is very shallow, showing clearly the brown

and golden bed ; and on low stone benches at the edge girls in little close white caps and blue aprons are busily washing with bare round arms. A pretty little maid with jet-black hair is cleaning some pink stuff on a great slab of stone, against a background of gray wall over which convolvulus and nasturtium are trailing ; a string of white linen is suspended above her head. This is a delightful picture. It is a gray day, sunless ; but the gray is luminous, and the reflections in the water are clear.

AURAY

AT THE FOIRE

CHAPTER XIV

AURAY

When we arrived in Auray it was market-day, and chatter filled the streets. There were avenues of women ranged along the pavement, their round wicker baskets full of lettuce, cabbages, carrots, turnips, chestnuts, pears, and what not—women in white flimsy caps, coloured cross-over shawls, and sombre black dresses. Their aprons were of many colours—reds, mauves, blues, maroons, and greens—and the wares also were of various hues. All the women knit between the intervals of selling, and even during the discussion of a bargain, for a purchase in Brittany is no small matter in the opinion of housewives, and engenders a great deal of conversation. All the feminine world of Auray seemed to have sallied forth that morning. Processions of them passed down the avenue of market women, most of them peasants in the cap of Auray, with snuff-coloured, large-bibbed aprons, carrying bulky black baskets with double handles.

Now and then one saw a Frenchwoman walking through the avenue of vegetables, just as good at bargaining, just as keen-eyed and sharp-tongued, as her humbler sisters. Sometimes she was pretty, walking with an easy swinging gait, her baby on one arm, her basket on the other, in a short trim skirt and altogether neatly dressed. More often she was dressed in unbecoming colours, her hair untidily arranged, her skirt trailing in the mud—a striking contrast to the well-to-do young Breton matron, with neatly braided black hair and clean rosy face, her white-winged lawn cap floating in the breeze, her red shawl neatly crossed over her lace-trimmed corsage. In her black velvet-braided skirt and wooden sabots the Breton is a dainty little figure, her only lapse into frivolity consisting of a gold chain at her neck and gold earrings.

Vegetables do not engender much conversation in a Breton market: they are served out and paid for very calmly. It is over the skeins of coloured wool, silks, and laces, that there is much bargaining. Round these stalls you will see girls and old hags face to face, and almost nose to nose, their arms crossed, speaking rapidly in shrill voices.

Just after walking past rows of very ordinary houses, suddenly you will come across a really fine

MID-DAY

old mansion, dating from the seventeenth century, white-faced, with ancient black beams, gables, and diamond panes. Then, just as you think that you have exhausted the resources of the town, and turn down a moss-grown alley homewards, you find yourself face to face with another town, typically Breton, white-faced and gray-roofed, clustering round a church and surrounded by old moss-grown walls. This little town is situated far down in a valley, into which you descend by a sloping green path. We sat on a stone bench above, and watched the people as they passed before us. There were bare-legged school-children in their black pinafores and red berés, hurrying home to *déjeuner*, swinging their satchels; and beggars, ragged and dirty, holding towards us tin cups and greasy caps, with many groans and whines. One man held a baby on his arm, and in the other hand a loaf of bread. The baby's face was dirty and covered with sores; but its hair was golden and curly, and the sight of that fair sweet head nodding over the father's shoulder as they went down the hill made one's heart ache. It was terrible to think that an innocent child could be so put out of touch with decent humanity.

To reach this little town one had to cross a sluggish river by a pretty gray stone bridge.

Some of the houses were quaint and picturesque, mostly with two stories, one projecting over the other, and low windows with broad sills, bricked down to the ground, on which were arranged pots of fuchsias, pink and white geraniums, and red-brown begonias. Nearly every house had its broad stone stoop, or settle, on which the various families sat in the warm afternoon drinking bowls of soup and eating *tartines de beurre.*

It is a notably provincial little town, full of flowers and green trees, and dark, narrow streets, across which hang audaciously strings of drying linen. All the children of the community appeared to be out and about—some skipping, others playing at peg-tops, and others merely sucking their fingers and their pinafores in the way that children have. One sweet child in a red pinafore, her hair plaited into four little tails tied with red ribbon, clasped a slice of bread-and-butter (butter side inwards, of course) to her chest, and was carelessly peeling an apple with a long knife at the same time, in such a way as to make my heart leap.

A happy wedding-party were swinging gaily along the quay arm in arm, singing some rollicking

Breton chanson, and all rather affected by their visits to the various *débits de boissons*. There were two men and two women — the men fair and bearded, wearing peaked caps ; the women in their best lace coifs and smartest aprons. As they passed everyone turned and pointed and laughed. It was probably a three days' wedding.

A mite of a girl walking gingerly along the street carried a bottle of ink ever so carefully, biting her lips in her anxiety to hold it steadily. Round her neck, on a sky-blue ribbon, hung a gorgeous silver cross, testifying to good behaviour during the week. Alack ! a tragedy was in store. The steps leading to the doorway of her home were steep, and the small person's legs were short and fat. She tripped and fell, and the ink was spilled —a large, indelible, angry black spot on the clean white step. Fearfully and pale-faced, the little maid looked anxiously about her, and strove to put the ink back again by means of a dry stick, staining fingers and pinafore the more. It was of no avail. Her mother had seen her. Out she rushed, a pleasant-faced woman in a white lace cap, now wearing a ferocious expression.

'Monster that thou art !' she cried, lifting the tearful, ink-bespattered child by the armpits, and

throwing her roughly indoors, whence piteous sounds of sobbing and wailing ensued.

The child's heart was broken; the silver cross had lost its charm; and the sun had left the heavens. The mother, busily bending over her sewing-machine, looked up at us through the window, and smiled understandingly.

A LITTLE MOTHER

BELLE ISLE

CHAPTER XV

BELLE ISLE

As a rule, a country becomes more interesting as one draws near to the sea; the colouring is more beautiful and the people are more picturesque. It is strange that the salt air should have such a mellowing effect upon a town and its inhabitants; but there is no doubt that it has. This seemed especially remarkable to us, coming straight from Carnac, that flat, gray treeless country where the people are sad and stolid, and one's only interest is in the dolmens and menhirs scattered over the landscape—strange blocks of stone about which one knows little, but imagines much.

When you come from a country such as this, you cannot but be struck by the warmth and wealth of colouring which the sea imparts to everything in its vicinity. Even the men and women grouped in knots on the pier were more picturesque, with their sun-bleached, tawny, red-gold hair, and their blue eyes, than the people

of Carnac. The men were handsome fellows—some in brown and orange clothing, toned and stained by the sea; others in deep-blue much be-patched coats and yellow oilskin trousers. Their complexions had a healthy reddish tinge — a warmth of hue such as one rarely sees in Brittany.

The colouring of the Bay of Quiberon on this particular afternoon was a tender pale mother-of-pearl. The sky was for the most part a broad, fair expanse of gray, with, just where the sun was setting, intervals of eggshell blue and palest lemon-yellows breaking through the drab; the sands were silvery; the low-lying ground was a dim gold; the water was gray, with purple and lemon-yellow reflections. The whole scene was broad and fair. The people on the pier and the boats on the water formed notes of luscious colour. The fishing-boats at anchor were of a brilliant green, with vermilion and orange sails and nets a gauzy blue. Ahead, on the brown rocks, although it was the calmest and best of weather, white waves were breaking and sending foam and spray high into the air. There was everywhere a fresh smell of salt.

We were anxious to go across to Belle Isle that night, and took tickets for a small, evil-smelling boat, the cargo of which was mostly soldiers. It

CURIOSITY

was rather a rough crossing, and we lay in the stuffy cabin longing to go on deck to see the sunset, which, by glimpses through the portholes, we could tell to be painting sea and sky in tones of flame. At last the spirit conquered the flesh, and, worried with the constant opening and shutting of doors by the noisy steward, we went on deck. A fine sight awaited us. From pearly grays and tender tones we had emerged into the fiery glories of a sunset sky. Behind us lay the dark gray-blue sea and the darker sky, flecked by pale pink clouds. Before us, the sun was shooting forth broad streaks of orange and vermilion on a ground of Venetian blue. Towards the horizon the colouring paled to tender pinks and lemon-yellows. As the little steamer ploughed on, Belle Isle rose into sight, a dark purple streak with tracts of lemon-gold and rosy clouds. The nearer we drew the lower sank the sun, until at last it set redly behind the island, picking out every point and promontory and every pine standing stiff against the sky.

Each moment the island loomed larger and darker, orange light shining out here and there in the mass. We were astonished by its size, for I had always imagined Belle Isle as being a miniature

place belonging entirely to Mme. Bernhardt. The entrance to the bay was narrow, and lay between two piers, with lights on either end ; and it was a strange sensation leaving the grays and blues and purples, the silvery moonlight, and the tall-masted boats behind us, and emerging into this warmth and wealth of colouring. A wonderful orange and red light shone behind the dark mass of the island, turning the water of the bay to molten gold and glorifying the red-sailed fishing-boats at anchor. As we drew near the shore, piercing shrieks came from the funnel. There appeared to be some difficulty about landing. Many directions were shouted by the captain and repeated by a shrill-voiced boy before we were allowed to step on shore over a precarious plank. Once landed, we were met by a brown-faced, sturdy woman, who picked up our trunks and shouldered them as if they were feather-weights for a distance of half a mile or so. She led the way to the hotel.

Next morning was dismal ; but, as we had only twenty-four hours to spend in Belle Isle, we hired a carriage to take us to the home of Mme. Bernhardt, and faced the weather. The sky was gray ; the country flat and bare, though interesting in a melancholy fashion. The scenery

consisted of mounds of brown overturned earth laid in regular rows in the fields, scrubby ground half-overgrown by gorse, clusters of dark pines, and a dreary windmill here and there. Now and then, by way of incident, we passed a group of white houses, surrounded by sad-coloured haystacks, and a few darkly-clad figures hurrying over the fields with umbrellas up, on their way to church. The Breton peasants are so pious that, no matter how far away from a town or village they may live, they attend Mass at least once on Sunday. A small procession passed us on the road—young men in their best black broadcloth suits, and girls in bright shawls and velvet-bound petticoats. This was a christening procession—at least, we imagined it to be so ; for one of the girls carried a long white bundle under an umbrella. Bretons are christened within twenty-four hours of birth.

The home of Mme. Bernhardt is a square fortress-like building, shut up during the autumn, with a beautifully-designed terrace garden. It is situated on a breezy promontory, and the great actress is in sole possession of a little bay wherein the sea flows smoothly and greenly on the yellow sands, and the massive purple rocks loom threateningly on either side with many a craggy peak.

Her dogs, large Danish boarhounds, rushed out, barking furiously, at our approach; her sheep and some small ponies were grazing on the scanty grass.

Our driver was taciturn. He seemed to be tuned into accord with the desolate day, and would vouchsafe no more than a grudging 'Oui' or 'Non' to our many questions, refusing point-blank to tell us to what places he intended driving us. At length he stopped the carriage on a cliff almost at the edge of a precipice. Thoughts that he was perhaps insane ran through my mind, and I stepped out hurriedly; but his intention was only to show us some cavern below. Mother preferred to remain above-ground; but, led by the driver, I went down some steps cut in the solid rock, rather slippery and steep, with on one side a sheer wall of rock, and the ocean on the other. The rock was dark green and flaky, with here and there veins of glistening pink and white mica. Lower and lower we descended, until it seemed as if we were stepping straight into the sea, which foamed against the great rocks, barring the entrance to the cavern.

The cavern itself was like a colossal railway-arch towering hundreds of feet overhead; and against

A SOLITARY MEAL

this and the rocks at the entrance the sea beat with much noise and splash, falling again with a groan in a mass of spray. Inside the cavern the tumult was deafening; but never have I seen anything more beautiful than those waves creaming and foaming over the green rocks, the blood-red walls of the cave rising sheer above, flecked with glistening mica. It was a contrast with the tame, flat, sad scenery over which we had been driving all the morning. This was Nature at her biggest and best, belittling everything one had ever seen or was likely to see, making one feel small and insignificant.

By-and-by we drove to a village away down in a hollow, a typical Breton fishing-village with yellow and white-faced *auberges*, and rows of boats moored to the quay, their nets and sails hauled down on this great day of the week, the Sabbath. As there was no hotel in the place, we entered a clean-looking *auberge* and asked for luncheon. The kitchen led out of the little *salle à manger*, and, as the door was left wide open, we could watch the preparation of our food. We were to have a very good soup; we saw the master of the house bringing in freshly-caught fish, which were grilled at the open fireplace, and fresh sardines; and

we heard our chicken frizzling on the spit. We saw the coffee-beans being roasted, and we were given the most exquisite pears and apples. Small matter that our room was shared by noisy soldiers, and that Adolphus (as we had named our driver) entered and drank before our very eyes more cognac than was good for him or reasonable on our bill.

Sunday afternoon in Belle Isle is a fashionable time. Between three and four people go down to the quay, clattering over the cobble stones in their best black sabots, to watch the steamers come in from Quiberon. You see girls in fresh white caps and neat black dresses, spruce soldiers, ladies *à la mode* in extravagant headgear and loud plaid or check dresses. On the quay they buy hot chestnuts. From our hotel we could watch the people as they passed, and the shopkeepers sitting and gossiping outside their doors. Opposite us was a souvenir shop, on the steps of which sat the proprietor with his boy. Very proud he was of the child—quite an ordinary spoiled child, much dressed up. The father followed the boy with his eyes wherever he went. He pretended to scold him for not getting out of the way when people passed, to attract their attention to the child. He

greeted every remark with peals of laughter, and repeated the witticisms to his friend the butcher next door, who did not seem to appreciate them. Every now and then he would glance over to see if the butcher were amused. French people, especially Bretons, are devoted to their children.

I was much amused in watching the little *bonne* at the hotel who carried our luggage the night before. She was quaint, compact, sturdy. She would carry a huge valise on her shoulder, or sometimes one in either hand. She ordered her husband about. She dressed her child in a shining black hat, cleaned its face with her pocket-handkerchief, straightened its pinafore, and sent it *en promenade* with papa, while she herself stumped off to carry more luggage. There was apparently no end to her strength. On her way indoors she paused on the step and cast a loving glance over her shoulder at the back view of her husband in his neatly-patched blue blouse and the little child in the black *sarrau* walking sedately down the road. She seemed so proud of the pair that we could not resist asking the woman if the child were hers, just to see the glad smile which lit up her face as she answered, 'Oui, mesdames!' I have often noticed how lenient Breton women are

to their children. They will speak in a big voice and frown, and a child imagines that Mother is in a towering rage; but you will see her turn round the next moment and smile at the bystander. If children only knew their power, how little influence parents would have over them!

The French differ from the British in the matter of emotion. On the steamer from Belle Isle to Quiberon there were some soldiers, about to travel with us, who were being seen off by four or five others standing on the quay. Slouching, unmilitary figures they looked, with baggy red trousers tied up at the bottoms, faded blue coats, and postmen-shaped hats, yellow, red, or blue pom-pom on top. One of the men on shore was a special friend of a soldier who was leaving. I was on tenter-hooks lest he should embrace him; he almost did so. He squeezed his hand; he picked fluff off his clothes; he straightened his hat. He repeatedly begged that his 'cher ami' would come over on the following Sunday to Belle Isle. Tears were very near his eyes; he was forced to bite his handerchief to keep them back. When the boat moved away, and they could join hands no longer, the soldiers blew kisses over the water to one another. They opened their arms

IN THE BOIS D'AMOUR

wide, shouted affectionate messages, and called one another by endearing terms. Altogether, they carried on as if they were neurotic girls rather than soldiers who had their way to make and their country to think of.

There was one man superior to his fellows. He held the same rank, and wore the same uniform; but he kept his buttons and his brass belt bright; he wore silk socks, and carried a gold watch under his military coat; his face was intelligent.

ST. ANNE D AURAY

CHAPTER XVI

ST. ANNE D'AURAY

Not far from the little town of Auray is the magnificent cathedral of St. Anne D'Auray, to which so many thousands from all over Brittany come annually to worship at the shrine of St. Anne. From all parts of the country they arrive—some on foot, others on horseback, or in strange country carts: marquises in their carriages; peasants plodding many a weary mile in their wooden sabots. Even old men and women will walk all through the day and night in order to be in time for the pardon of St. Anne.

The Breton people firmly believe that their household cannot prosper, that their cattle and their crops cannot thrive, that their ships are not safe at sea, unless they have been at least once a year to burn candles at the shrine. The wealthy bourgeois's daughter, in her new dress, smart apron, and Paris shoes, kneels side by side with a ragged beggar; the peasant farmer, with long gray

hair, white jacket, breeches and leather belt, mingles his supplications with those of a nobleman's son. All are equal here; all have come in the same humble, repentant spirit; for the time being class distinctions are swept away. Noble and peasant crave their special boons; each confesses his sins of the past year; all stand bareheaded in the sunshine, humble petitioners to St. Anne.

At the time of the pardon, July 25, the ordinarily quiet town is filled to overflowing. There is a magnificent procession, all green and gold and crimson, headed by the Bishop of Vannes. A medley of people come from all parts to pray in the cathedral, and to bathe in the miraculous well, the water of which will cure any ailment.

It is said that in the seventh century St. Anne appeared to one Nicolazic, a farmer, and commanded him to dig in a field near by for her image. This having been found, she bade him erect a chapel on the spot to her memory. Several chapels were afterwards built, each in its turn grander and more important, until at last the magnificent church now standing was erected. On the open place in front is a circle of small covered-in stalls, where chaplets, statuettes, tall

A BRETON FARMER

wax candles, rings, and sacred ornaments of all kinds, are sold.

Directly you appear within that circle, long doleful cries are set up from every vendor, announcing the various wares that he or she has for sale. You are offered rosaries for sixpence, and for four sous extra you can have them blessed. A statue of the Virgin can be procured for fourpence; likewise the image of St. Anne. Wherever you may go in the circle, you are pestered by these noisy traders. There is something incongruous in such sacred things being hawked about the streets, and their various merits shrieked at you as you pass. We went to a shop near by, where we could look at the objects quietly and at leisure.

The church, built of light-gray stone, is full of the richest treasures you can imagine—gold, jewels, precious marbles, and priceless pictures. One feels almost surfeited by so much magnificence. Every square inch of the walls is covered with slabs of costly marble, on which are inscribed, in letters of gold, thanks to St. Anne for benefits bestowed and petitions for blessings.

Although one cannot but be touched by the worship of St. Anne and the simple belief of the

people in her power to cure all, to accomplish all, one is a little upset by these costly offerings. Nevertheless, it is a marvellous faith, this Roman Catholic religion : the more you travel in a country like Brittany, the more you realize it. There must be a great power in a religion that draws people hundreds of miles on foot, and enables them, after hours of weary tramping, to spend a day praying on the hard stones before the statue of a saint.

ST. MALO

CHAPTER XVII

ST. MALO

When you are nearing the coast of France all you can see is a long narrow line, without relief, apparently without design, without character, just a sombre strip of horizon; but St. Malo is always visible. A fine needle-point breaks the uninteresting line: it is the belfry of St. Malo. To left and right of the town is a cluster of islands, dark masses of rock over which the waves foam whitely. St. Malo is magnificently fortified. It is literally crowned with military defences. It is a mass of formidable fortresses, rigid angles, and severe gray walls. It speaks of the seventeenth century, telling of a time when deeds of prowess were familiar. The sea, which is flowing, beats furiously against the walls of defence, protected by the trunks of great trees planted in the sand. These gigantic battalions stop the inrush of the water, and would make landing more arduous to an enemy. They have a bizarre effect when seen from the distance.

The town defied all the efforts of the English to capture her. On one occasion they laid mines as far as the Porte of St. Malo; but the Virgin, enshrined above the gate, and ever watching over the people, disclosed the plot by unfolding her arms and pointing with one hand to the ground beneath her. The Bretons dug where she pointed, and discovered their imminent peril. Thus was the city saved. To-day the shrine receives the highest honours, and is adorned with the finest and sweetest flowers.

For one reason at least St. Malo is unique. It is a town of some thousand inhabitants; yet it is still surrounded by mediæval walls. Of all the towns in Brittany, St. Malo is the only one which still remains narrowly enclosed within walls. It is surrounded by the sea except for a narrow neck of land joining the city to the mainland. This is guarded at low tide by a large and fierce bulldog, the image of which has been added to St. Malo's coat of arms. Enclosed within a narrow circle of walls, and being unable to expand, the town is peculiar. The houses are higher than usual, and the streets narrower. There is no waste ground in St. Malo. Every available inch is built upon. The sombre streets run uphill and downhill. There is

IN THE EYE OF THE SUN

no town like St. Malo. Its quaint, tortuous streets, of corkscrew form, culminate in the cathedral, which, as you draw near, does not seem to be a cathedral at all, but a strong fort. So narrow are the streets, and so closely are they gathered round the cathedral, that it is only when you draw away to some distance that you can see the beautifully-sculptured stone tower of many points.

Up and down the steep street the people clatter in their thick-soled sabots. It is afternoon, and most of the townspeople have turned out for a walk, to gaze in the shop windows with their little ones. The people are rather French; and the children, instead of being clad in the Breton costume, wear smart kilted skirts, white socks, and shiny black sailor hats. Still, there is a subtle difference between these people and the French. You notice this directly you arrive. There is something solid, something pleasant and unartificial, about them. The women of the middle classes are much better-looking, and they dress better; the men are of stronger physique, with straight, clean-cut features and a powerful look.

Very attractive are these narrow hilly streets, with their throngs of people and their gay little shops where the wares are always hung outside—

worsted shawls, scarlet and blue berés, Breton china (decorated by stubby figures of men and women and heraldic devices), chaplets, shrines to the Virgin Mary, many-coloured cards, religious and otherwise.

There are a few houses which perpetuate the past. You are shown the house of Queen Anne, the good Duchess Anne, a house with Gothic windows, flanked by a tower, blackened and strangely buffeted by the blows of time. Queen Anne was a marvellous woman, and has left her mark. Her memory is kept green by the lasting good that she achieved. From town to town she travelled during the whole of her reign, for she felt that to rule well and wisely she must be ever in close touch with her people. No woman was more beloved by the populace. Everywhere she went she was fêted and adored. She ruled her province with a rod of iron; yet she showed herself to be in many ways wonderfully feminine. Nothing could have been finer than the act of uniting Brittany with France by giving up her crown to France and remaining only the Duchess Anne. In almost every town in Brittany there is a Queen Anne House, a house which the good Queen either built herself or stayed in. Everywhere she went she

SUNDAY

constructed something — a church, a chapel, an oratory, a *calvaire*, a house, a tomb—by which she was to be remembered. There is, for example, the famous tower which she built, in spite of all malcontents, not so much in order to add to the defences of St. Malo as to rebuke the people for their turbulence and rebellion. Her words concerning it ring through the ages, and will never be forgotten:

'Quic en groigneir
Ainsy ser
C'est mon playsir.'

Ever since the tower has gone by the name of 'Quiquengroigne.'

There are three names, three figures, of which St. Malo is proud; the birthplaces are pointed out to the stranger fondly. One is that of the Duchess Anne; another that of Duguay-Trouin; last, but not least, we have Chateaubriand. Of the three, perhaps the picturesque figure of Duguay-Trouin charms one most. From my earliest days I have loved stories of the gallant sailor, whose adventures and mishaps are as fascinating as those of Sinbad. I have always pictured him as a heroic figure on the bridge of a vessel, wearing a powdered wig, a lace scarf, and the dress of the

period, winning victory after victory, and shattering fleets. It is disappointing to realize that this hero lived in the Rue Jean de Chatillon, in a three-storied, time-worn house with projecting windows, lozenge-paned. Of Chateaubriand I know little; but his birthplace is in St. Malo, for all who come to see.

What a revelation it is, after winding up the narrow, steep streets of St. Malo, suddenly to behold, framed in an archway of the old mediæval walls, the sea! There is a greeny-blue haze so vast that it is difficult to trace where the sea ends and the sky begins. The beach is of a pale yellow-brown where the waves have left it, and pink as it meets the water. At a little distance is an island of russet-brown rocks, half-covered with seaweed; at the base is a circle of tawny sand, and at the summit yellow-green grass is growing.

MONT ST. MICHEL

THE CRADLE

CHAPTER XVIII

MONT ST. MICHEL

The road to Mont St. Michel is colourless and dreary. On either side are flat gray marshes, with little patches of scrubby grass. Here and there a few sheep are grazing. How the poor beasts can find anything to eat at all on such barren land is a marvel. Gradually the scenery becomes drearier, until at last you are driving on a narrow causeway, with a river on one side and a wilderness of treacherous sand on the other.

Suddenly, on turning a corner, you come within view of Mont St. Michel. No matter how well prepared you may be for the apparition, no matter what descriptions you may have read or heard beforehand, when you see that three-cornered mass of stone rising from out the vast wilderness of sand, you cannot but be astonished and overwhelmed. You are tempted to attribute this bizarre achievement to the hand of the magician. It is uncanny.

Just now it is low tide, and the Mount lies in the

midst of an immense moving plain, on which three rivers twist, like narrow threads intersecting it—Le Conesnon, La Sée, and La Seline. Several dark islands lie here and there uncovered, and groups of small boats are left high and dry. It is fascinating to watch the sea coming up, appearing like a circle on the horizon, and slipping gently over the sands, the circle ever narrowing, until the islands are covered once more, the boats float at anchor, and the waves precipitate themselves with a loud booming sound, heard for miles round, against the double walls that protect the sacred Mount.

Many are the praises that have been sung of Mont St. Michel by poets and artists, by historians and architects. She has been called 'A poem in stone,' 'Le palais des angles,' 'An inspiration of the Divine,' 'La cité des livres,' 'Le boulevard de la France,' 'The sacred mount,' etc. Normandy and Brittany dispute her. She is in the possession of either, as you will.

Mont St. Michel is not unlike Gibraltar. As you come suddenly upon the place, rising from out the misty grayish-yellow, low-lying marshes, it appears to be a dark three-cornered mass, surrounded by stout brownish battlemented walls,

SOUPE MAIGRE

flanked by rounded turrets, against a background of blue sky. At the base of the Mount lies the city, the houses built steeply one above the other, some with brownish lichen-covered roofs, others of modern slate. Above the city is the monastery—brown walls, angry and formidable, rising steeply, with many windows and huge buttresses. Beyond, on the topmost point, is the grand basilica consecrated to the archangel, the greenish light of whose windows you can see clearly. Above all rises a tall gray spire culminating in a golden figure.

There is only one entrance to Mont St. Michel—over a footbridge and beneath a solid stone archway, from which the figure of the Virgin in a niche looks down. You find yourself in a narrow, steep street, black and dark with age, and crowded with shops and bazaars and cafés. The town appears to be given up to the amusement and entertainment of visitors; and, as St. Michael is the guardian saint of all strangers and pilgrims, I suppose this is appropriate. Tourists fill the streets and overflow the hotels and cafés; the town seems to live, thrive, and have its being entirely for the tourists. Outside every house hangs a sign advertising coffee or china or curios, as the case may be, and

so narrow is the street that the signs on either side meet.

Your first thought on arriving is about getting something to eat. The journey from St. Malo is long, and, although the sun is shining and the sky is azure blue, the air is biting. Of course, everyone who comes to the Mount has heard of Mme. Poulard. She is as distinctly an institution as the very walls and fortresses. All know of her famous coffee and delicious omelettes; all have heard of her charm. It is quite an open question whether the people flock there in hundreds on a Sunday morning for the sake of Mme. Poulard's luncheon or for the attractions of Mont St. Michel itself. There she stands in the doorway of her hotel, smiling, gracious, affable, handsome. No one has ever seen Mme. Poulard ruffled or put out. However many unexpected visitors may arrive, she greets them all with a smile and words of welcome.

We were amid a very large stream of guests; yet she showed us into her great roomy kitchen, and seated us before the huge fireplace, where a brace of chickens, steaming on a spit, were being continually basted with butter by stout, gray-haired M. Poulard. She found time to inquire

about our journey and our programme for the day, and directed us to the various show-places of the Mount.

There is only one street of any importance in Mont St. Michel, dark and dim, very narrow, no wider than a yard and a half; a drain runs down the middle. Here you find yourself in an absolute wilderness of Poulard. You are puzzled by the variety and the relations of the Poulards. Poulard greets you everywhere, written in large black letters on a white ground.

If you mount some steps and turn a corner suddenly, Poulard *frère* greets you; if you go for a harmless walk on the ramparts, the renowned coffee of Poulard *veuve* hits you in the face. Each one strives to be the right and only Poulard. You struggle to detach yourselves from these Poulards. You go through a fine mediæval archway, past shops where valueless, foolish curios are for sale; you scramble up picturesque steps, only to be told once more in glaring letters that POULARD spells Poulard.

A very picturesque street is the main thoroughfare of Mont St. Michel, mounting higher and higher, with tall gray-stone and wooden houses on either side, the roofs of which often meet overhead.

Each window has its pots of geraniums and its show of curios and useless baubles. Fish-baskets hang on either side of the doors. Some of the houses have terrace gardens, small bits of level places cut into the rock, where roses grow and trailing clematis. Ivy mainly runs riot over every stone and rock and available wall. The houses are built into the solid rock one above another, and many of them retain their air of the fourteenth or the fifteenth century.

You pass a church of Jeanne d'Arc. A bronze statue of the saint stands outside the door. One always goes upwards in Mont St. Michel, seeing the dark purplish-pink mass of the grand old church above you, with its many spires of sculptured stone. Stone steps lead to the ramparts. Here you can lean over the balustrade and look down upon the waste of sand surrounding Mont St. Michel. All is absolutely calm and noiseless. Immediately below is the town, its clusters of new gray-slate roofs mingling with those covered in yellow lichen and green moss ; also the church of the village, looking like a child's plaything perched on the mountain-side. Beyond and all around lies a sad, monotonous stretch of pearl-gray sand, with only a darkish, narrow strip of land between

DÉJEUNER

it and the leaden sky—the coast of Normandy. Sea-birds passing over the country give forth a doleful wail. The only signs of humanity at all in the immensity of this great plain are some little black specks—men and women searching for shell-fish, delving in the sand and trying to earn a livelihood in the forbidding waste.

The melancholy of the place is terrible. I have seen people of the gayest-hearted natures lean over that parapet and gaze ahead for hours. This great gray plain has a strange attraction. It draws out all that is sad and serious from the very depths of you, forcing you to think deeply, moodily. Joyous thoughts are impossible. At first you imagine that the scenery is colourless; but as you stand and watch for some time, you discover that it is full of colour. There are pearly greens and yellows and mauves, and a kind of phosphorescent slime left by the tide, glistening with all the hues of the rainbow.

Terribly dangerous are these shifting sands. In attempting to cross them you need an experienced guide. The sea mounts very quickly, and mists overtake you unexpectedly. Many assailants of the rock have been swallowed in the treacherous sands.

Being on this great height reminded me of a legend I had heard of the sculptor Gautier, a man of genius, who was shut up in the Abbey of Mont St. Michel and carved stones to keep himself from going mad—you can see these in the abbey to this day. For some slight reason François I. threw the unfortunate sculptor into the black cachot of the Mount, and there he was left in solitude, to die by degrees. His hair became quite white, and hung long over his shoulders; his cheeks were haggard; he grew to look like a ghost. His youth could no longer fight against the despair overhanging him; his miseries were too great for him to bear; he became almost insane. One day, by a miracle, Mass was held, not in the little dark chapel under the crypts, but in the church on high, on the topmost pinnacle of the Mount. It was a Sunday, a fête-day. The sun shone, not feebly, as I saw it that day, but radiantly, the windows of the church glistening. It was blindingly beautiful. The joy of life surrounded him; the sweetness and freshness of the spring was in the air. The irony of men and things was too great for his poor sorrow-laden brain. He cleared the parapet, and was dashed to atoms below. Poor Gautier! It was his only chance of escape. One realized that as one looked

A FARMHOUSE KITCHEN

up at those immense prison walls, black and frowning, sheer and unscaleable, every window grated and barred. What chance would a prisoner have? If it were possible for him to escape from the prison itself, there would be the town below to pass through. Only one narrow causeway joins the island to the mainland, and all round there is nothing but sea and sandy wastes.

I was disturbed in my reverie by a loud nasal voice shouting, 'Par ici, messieurs et dames, s'il vous plaît.' It was the guide, and willy-nilly we must go and make the rounds of the abbey among a crowd of other sightseers. An old blind woman on the abbey steps, evidently knowing that we were English by our tread, moistened her lips and drew in her breath in preparation for a begging whine as we approached. We passed through a huge red door of a glorious colour, up a noble flight of wide steps, with hundreds of feet of wall on either side, into a lofty chapel, falling to decay, and being renovated in parts. It was of a ghostly greenish stone, with fluted pillars of colossal height, ending in stained-glass windows and a vaulted roof, about which black-winged bats were flying. Room after room we passed through, the guide making endless and monotonous explanations and observations in

a parrot-like voice, until we reached the cloister. This is the pearl of Mont St. Michel, the wonder of wonders. It is a huge square court. In the middle of the quadrangle it is open to the sky, and the sun shines through in a golden blaze. All round are cool dim walks roofed overhead by gray arches supported by small, graceful, rose-coloured pillars in pairs. This is continued round the whole length of the court. Let into the wall are long benches of stone, to which, in olden days, the monks came to meditate and pray. The ancient atmosphere has been well preserved; yet the building is so little touched by time, owing to the careful renovations of a clever architect, that one almost expects at any moment to see a brown-robed monk disturbed in his meditations.

From the quiet courtyard we are taken down into the very heart of the coliseum — into the mysterious cells where the damp of the rock penetrates the solid stone. How gloomy it was down in these crypts! Even the names of them made one tremble—'Galerie de l'Aquilon,' 'Petit Exil,' and 'Grand Exil.' You think of Du Bourg, tightly fettered hand and foot, being eaten alive by rats; of the Comte Grilles, condemned to die of starvation, being fed by a peasant, who

bravely climbed to his window; of a hundred gruesome tales. There is the chapel where the last offices of the dead were performed—a cell in which the light struggled painfully through the narrow windows, feebly combating with the dark night of the chamber; and there is the narrow stairway, in the thickness of the wall, by which the bodies of the prisoners were taken.

We were shown the cachot and the oubliette where the living body of the prisoner was attacked by rats. That, however, was a simple torture compared with the strait-jacket and the iron cage. In the oubliette the miserable men could clasp helpless hands, curse or pray, as the case might be; but in the iron cage the death agony was prolonged.

Even now, although the poor souls took wings long ago, the cachot and the oubliette fill you with disgust. You feel stifled there. The atmosphere is vitiated. Even though centuries have passed since those terrible times, the walls seem to be still charged with iniquity, with all the sighs exhaled, with all the smothered cries, with all the tears, with all the curses of impatient sufferers, with all the prayers of saints.

It seems impossible to believe, down in the heart

of this world of stone, in the impenetrable darkness, that the architect that designed this thick and cruel masonry constructed those airy belfries, those balustrades of lace, those graceful arches, those towers and minarets. It is as if he had wished to shut up the sorrow and the maniacal cries of the men who had lost their reason in a fair exterior, attracting the eyes of the world to that which was beautiful, and making it forget the misery beneath.

MARIE

CHÂTEAU DES ROCHERS

A FARM LABOURER

CHAPTER XIX

CHÂTEAU DES ROCHERS

The name of Mme. Sévigné rings through the ages. Vitré is full of it. Inhabitants will point out, close to the ruined ramparts, the winter palace where the *spirituelle Marquise* received the Breton nobility and sometimes the Kings of Brittany. To the south they will show you the Château des Rochers, the princely country residence maintained by this famous woman. She was a Breton of the Bretons, building and planting, often working in the fields with her farm hands. She loved her Château des Rochers. It was a joy to leave the town and the gaieties of Court for the freshness of the fields and the woods. She especially liked to be there for the 'Triomphe du mois de Mai'—to hear the nightingale and the cuckoo saluting spring with song. With Lafontaine, she found inspiration in the fields; but, as she preserved a solid fund of Gaelic humour, she laughed also, and the country did not often make her melancholy. She felt the

sadness of autumn in her woods; but she never became morose. She never wearied of her garden. She had always some new idea with regard to it—some new plan to lure her from a letter begun or a book opened. Before reading the memoirs of Mme. Sévigné it is almost impossible to realize this side of her nature. Who would have imagined that this woman of the salons, fêted in Paris, and known everywhere, would be always longing for her country home? It is only when you visit the famous Château des Rochers that you realize to the full that she was a lover of nature and country habits. Wandering through the old-world garden, you find individual touches which bring back the dainty Marquise vividly to mind. There are the venerable trees, under which you may wander and imagine yourself back in the time of Louis XIV. There are the deep and shady avenues planted by Mme. Sévigné, and beautiful to this day. The names come back to you as you walk—'La Solitaire,' 'L'Infini,' 'L'honneur de ma fille'—avenues in which madame sat to see the sun setting behind the trees. Very quiet is this garden, with its broad shady paths, its wide spaces of green, its huge cedars growing in the grass, and its stiff flower-beds. There is Mme. Sévigné's sundial, on which she

A LITTLE WATER-CARRIER

inscribed with her own hand a Latin verse. There are the stiff rows of poplars, like Noah's Ark trees, symmetrical, interlacing one with the other, unnatural but dainty in design. There is her rose garden, a rounded and terraced walk planted with roses. There, too, are the sunny 'Place Madame,' the 'Place Coulanges,' and 'L'Écho,' where two people, standing on stones placed a certain distance apart, can hear the echo plainly. This garden, with its stiff little rows of trees, its sunny open squares surrounded by low walls, and its stone vases overgrown with flowers, brings back the past so vividly that one asks one's self whether indeed Mme. Sévigné is there no longer, and glances involuntarily down the avenues and the by-ways, half expecting to distinguish the rapid passage of a majestic skirt. What a splendid life this woman of the seventeenth century led! She knew well how to regulate mind and body. The routine of the day at Les Rochers was never varied, and was designed so perfectly that there was rarely a jar or a hitch. She rose at eight, and enjoyed the freshness of the woods until the hour for matins struck. After that there were the 'Good-mornings' to be said to everyone on her estate. She must pick flowers for the table, and read and work. When her son was no longer with

her she read aloud to broaden the mind of his wife. At five o'clock her time became her own; and on fine days, a lacquey following, she wandered down the pleasant avenues, dreaming visions of the future, of God and of His providence, sometimes reading a book of devotions, sometimes a book of history. On days of storm, when the trees dripped and the slates fell from the roof,—on days so wet and gray and wild that you would not turn a dog out of doors—you would suppose the Marquise to become morbid and miserable. Not at all. She realized that she must kill time, and she did so by a hundred ingenious devices. She deplored the weather which kept her indoors, but fixed her thoughts on the morrow. Ladies and gentlemen often invaded her; all the nobility came to present their compliments. They assailed her from all sides. When she resisted them, and strove to shut herself away from the world, the Duke would come and carry her away in his carriage.

She always longed to return to her solitude—to her dear Rochers, where her good priest waited, at once her administrator, her man of affairs, her architect, and her friend. Her pride of property was great, and she was constantly beautifying and embellishing her country home. Each year saw

some new change. On one occasion six years passed without her visiting Les Rochers. All her trees had become big and beautiful ; some of them were forty or fifty feet high. Her joy when she beheld them gives one an insight into her youthfulness.

How young she was in some things ! She often asked herself whence came this exuberance. She drew caricatures of the affectations of her neighbours, and the anxious inquiries of her friends as to her happiness during her voluntary exile amused her immensely. In a letter written to her daughter she said :

' I laugh sometimes at what they call " spending the winter in the woods." Mme. de C—— said to me the other day, " Leave your damp Rochers." I answered her, " Damp yourself—it is your country that is damp ; but we are on a height." It is as though I said, Your damp Montmartre. These woods are at present penetrated by the sun whenever it shines. On the Place Madame when the sun is at its height, and at the end of the great avenue when the sun is setting, it is marvellous. When it rains there is a good room with my people here, who do not trouble me. I do what I want, and when there is no one here we are still

better off, for we read with a pleasure which we prefer above everything.'

The prospect of spending a winter at Les Rochers did not frighten her in the least. She wrote to her daughter, saying, 'My purpose to spend the winter at Les Rochers frightens you. Alas! my daughter, it is the sweetest thing in the world.'

Mme. Sévigné was always thinking of her daughter, and of Provence, where she lived. Her heart went out to her daughter. Everything about Les Rochers helped her to remember her beloved child. Even the country itself seemed to bring back memories, for the nights of July were so perfumed with orange-blossoms that one might imagine one's self to be really in Provence. Mme. Sévigné wrote in a letter to one of her friends:

'I have established a home in the most beautiful place in the world, where no one keeps me company, because they would die of cold. The abbé goes backwards and forwards over his affairs. I am there thinking of Provence, for that thought never leaves me.'

The château in which this wonderful woman lived, whence started so many couriers to Provence, is an important building, gray, a little heavy with

WEARY

towers, with high turrets of slate and great windows. Resembling most houses built in the Louis XIV. style, it is rather sad in design. At the side is a chapel surmounted by a cross, a rotund hexagonal building constructed in 1671 by the Abbot of Coulanges. Inside it is gorgeous with old rose and gold. One can imagine the gentle Marquise kneeling here at her devotions.

Visitors are shown the bedroom of Mme. Sévigné, now transformed into a historical little sanctuary. The furniture consists of a large four-post bed, with a covering of gold and blue, embroidered, it is said, by the Countess of Grignan. Under a glass case have been treasured all the accessories of her toilet—an arsenal of feminine coquetry: brushes, powder-boxes, patch-boxes, autograph letters, account-books, her own ink-stand, books written in the clear, delicate, legible handwriting of the Marquise herself.

The walls are hung with pictures of the family and intimate friends, some of which are very remarkable. This room was called by Mme. Sévigné the 'green room.' It still has a dainty atmosphere. Here Mme. Sévigné passed a great part of her life. Under a large window is a marble table where she is supposed to have written those letters which one

knows almost as well as the fables of Lafontaine. Mme. Sévigné coloured the somewhat cold though pure language of the seventeenth century, but not artificially. She animated it, conveyed warmth into it, by putting into her writings much that was feminine, never descending to the 'precious' or to be a blue-stocking. The books that she loved, and her correspondence, did not take up so much of her time that she had to overlook the details of her domain. Sometimes she had a little fracas with her cook; often she would be called away to listen to the complaints of Pilois, her gardener, a philosopher. She knew how to feel strongly among people who could feel only their own misfortunes and disgraces. She had a true and thoughtful soul. This one can tell by her letters from Les Rochers, which come to us in all their freshness, as if they had been written yesterday.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

CARNAC

IN THE INGLENOOK

CHAPTER XX

CARNAC

The country round Carnac is solemn and mysterious, full of strange Druidical monuments, menhirs and dolmens of fabulous antiquity, ancient stone crosses, *calvaires*, and carvings. Everything is grand, solemn, and gigantic. One finds intimate traces of the Middle Ages. The land is still half-cultivated and divided into small holdings; the fields are strewn with ancient stones.

The Lines of Carnac are impressive. You visit them in the first place purely as a duty, as something which has to be seen; but you are amply repaid. On a flat plain of heather or gorse they lie, small and gray and ghost-like in the distance, but looming larger as you draw near. You come across several in a farmyard; but on scaling a small loosely-built stone wall you find yourself in the midst of them—lines of colossal stones planted point-downwards, some as high as twenty feet,

and stretching away to the horizon, on a space of several miles, like a gigantic army of phantoms. Originally the Lines of Carnac were composed of six thousand stones; but to-day there remain only several hundreds. They have been destroyed bit by bit, and used by the peasants as fences along the fields and in the construction of houses.

We sat on a rock and gazed at these strange things, longing to know their origin. What enigmas they were, wrapped in mournful silence, solemn and still, sphinx-like! I endeavoured to become an amateur Sherlock Holmes. I examined the stones all over. I noticed that at the extremity of one line they were placed in a semicircle. This did not seem to lead me on the road to discovery. Of what avail is it to attempt to read the mystery of these silent Celtic giants? Historians and archæologists have sought in vain to find a solution to the problem. Some say that the stones planted in the fields are temples dedicated to the cult of the serpent; others maintain that this is a sort of cemetery, where the dead of Carnac and of Erderen were interred after a terrible battle. They are variously taken to be sacred monuments, symbols of divinity, funeral piles, trophies of victory, testimonies to the passing of a race, the

A BLIND BEGGAR

remains of a Roman encampment. Innumerable are the surmises.

The country people have their own versions of the origin of these stones. The peasants round about Carnac firmly believe that these menhirs are inhabited by a terrible race of little black men who, if they can but catch you alone at midnight, will make you dance, leaping round you in circles by the light of the moon with great shouts of laughter and piercing cries, until you die of fatigue, making the neighbouring villagers shiver in their beds. Some say that these stones have been brought here by the Virgin Mary in her apron; others that they are Roman soldiers, petrified as was the wife of Lot, and changed into rocks by some good apostle; others, again, that they were thrown from the moon by Beelzebub to kill some amiable fairy.

A boy was sitting on a stone near us. He had followed us, and had sat leaning his head on his hand and gazing backwards and forwards from us to the stones. Out of curiosity to hear what his ideas might be, I asked the child what he imagined the menhirs were. Without a moment's hesitation he said, 'Soldats de St. Cornely!'

Afterwards I discovered that St. Cornely is in

this country one of the most honoured saints. It is he that protects the beasts of the field. His *pardon* used to be much attended by peasants, who took with them their flocks of sheep and cows. St. Cornely had occasion to fly before a regiment of soldiers sent in pursuit by an idolatrous king. In the moment of his fear—for even saints experience fear—he went towards the sea, and soon saw that all retreat was cut off thereby. The oxen fell on their knees, their eyes full of dread. The situation was terrible. The saint appealed to Heaven, where lay his only hope, and, stretching his arm towards the soldiers, changed them suddenly into stone. Here, it is said, the soldiers of St. Cornely have remained ever since, fixed and rigid.

A ROMANTIC LAND

LA PETITE MARIE

CHAPTER XXI

A ROMANTIC LAND

BRITTANY is essentially a romantic country. It is full of mysteries and legends and superstitions. Romance plays a great part in the life of the meanest peasant. Every stock and stone and wayside shrine in his beloved country is invested with poetical superstition and romance. A nurse that we children once had, nineteen years of age, possessed an enormous stock of legends, which she had been brought up to look upon as absolute truth. Some of the songs which she sang to the baby at bedtime in a low minor key were beautiful in composition—'Marie ta fille,' 'Le Biniou,' amongst others. The village schoolmaster, who was our tutor, during our long afternoon rambles would often make the woods ring as he sang ballads in his rich, full voice. The theme changed according to his humour. Now the song was a canticle, relating the legend of some saint, or a pious chronicle; at another time it was of love

he sang, generally ending sadly. Then, there was the historical song, recounting some sombre, or touching, or stirring event, when the little man worked himself up to a high pitch of excitement, carrying us children open-mouthed to gory battle-fields and the palaces of sumptuous Kings. One quite forgot the insignificant schoolmaster in the rush and swing of the music.

There are many Breton ballads. The lives of the people are reflected truthfully in these compositions, which have as their themes human weakness, or heartache, or happiness. The Breton bards are still a large class. In almost every village there is someone who composes and sings. Each one holds in his or her hand a small stick of white wood, carved with notches and strange signs, which help towards remembering the different verses. The Gauls called this stick, the use of which is very ancient, the alphabet of the bards.

Mendicity is protected in Brittany. One meets beggars at all the fairs, and often on the high-roads. They earn their living by songs and ballads. They attend family fêtes, and, above all, marriage ceremonies, composing songs in celebration. No Breton will refuse a bard the best of his hospitality. Bards are honoured guests. 'Dieu vous

THE LITTLE HOUSEWIFE

bénisse, gens de cette maison,' says one, announcing himself. He is installed in the ingle-nook, the cosiest corner of a Breton kitchen; and after having refreshed the inner man he rewards his host with song after song, often giving him the last ballad of his composition. When he takes his leave, a large bundle of food is slung over his shoulder. Unless you live for years in the same village, as I have done, sharing in the joys and sorrows of the people, you can gain very little knowledge of the tales and songs and legends. The Breton is reticent on the advent of the stranger: he fears ridicule.

Then, again, a child can always wriggle itself into the hearts and homes of people. Setting aside all racial prejudices and difficulties of language, a child will instal itself in a household, and become familiar with the little foibles of each inmate in a single day, whereas a grown-up person may strive in vain for years. I, as a child, had a Breton *bonne*, and used to spend most of my days at her home, a farm some distance from the village, playing on the cottage floor with her little brothers and sisters, helping to milk the cows, and poking the fat pigs. This, I think, Mother could scarcely have been aware of; for she had forbidden Marie

to allow me to associate with dirty children, and these were certainly not too clean. One day I was playing at dolls with a village girl under the balcony of Mother's room. Suddenly, on looking up, I found her gazing at me reproachfully.

'O Mother,' I hastened to explain, pulling the child forward by the pinafore, 'she are clean.' We children were familiar with everyone in the village, even bosom friends with all, from stout Batiste, the butcher, to Lucia the little seamstress, and Leontine her sister, who lived by the bridge. If a child died we attended the funeral, all dressed in white, holding lighted tapers in our hands, and feeling important and impressive. If one was born, we graciously condescended to be present at the baptismal service and receive the boxes of dragées always presented to guests on such occasions. At all village processions we figured prominently.

When I returned to Brittany, at the age of ten, I found things very little changed. My friends were a trifle older; but they remembered me and welcomed me, receiving me into their midst as before. My sister and I took part in all the *pardons* of the surrounding villages. We learnt the quaint Breton dances, and would pace up and down the dusty roads in the full glare of the summer sun

hour after hour, dressed in the beautiful costume of the country—black broadcloth skirts, white winged caps, and sabots. Often we would go with our *bonne* and our respective partners into some neighbouring *débits de boissons* and drink *syrops* in true Breton fashion. At one *pardon* we won the *ruban d'honneur* — a broad bright-blue ribbon with silver tassels worn across the shoulder, and presented to the best dancer.

The Breton gavotte is a strange dance of religious origin. The dancers hold hands in a long line, advancing and retiring rhythmically to long-drawn-out music. Underneath an awning sit the two professional biniou-players, blowing with all their might into their instruments and beating time with their feet to the measure. The *sonneur de biniou* is blind, and quite wrapped up in his art; he lives, as it were, in a world apart. The *joueur de biniou*, the principal figure, reminding one of a Highland piper, presses his elbow on the large leather air-bag, playing the air, with its many variations, clear and sweet, on the reed pipe.

Brittany is the land of *pardons*. During the summer these local festivities are taking place daily in one village or another. The *pardon* is a thing apart; it resembles neither the Flemish *kermesse*

nor the Parisian *foire*. Unlike the *foires* of Paris, created for the gay world, for the men and women who delight in turning night into day, the *pardon* has inspiration from high sources : it is the fête of the soul. The people gather together from far and near, not only to amuse themselves, but also to pray. They pass long hours before the images of the saints ; they make the tour of the 'Chemin de la Croix,' kneeling on the granite floor.

Still, it is a joyous festival. The air is filled with shouts and laughter. For example, in Quimper, at the Feast of the Assumption, the Place St. Corentin is crowded. People have come from the surrounding towns, all dressed in the characteristic costume of their vicinities. Pont-Aven, Pont L'Abbé, Concarneau, Fouesnant, Quimperlé—all are represented. You see the tight lace wide-winged cap of the Douarnénez women, hats bound with coloured chenile of the men of Carhaix, white flannel coats bordered with black velvet of the peasants of Guéméné, the flowered waistcoats of Pleavé ; the women of Quimper have pyramidical coifs of transparent lace, showing the pink or blue ribbon beneath, with two long floating ends.

The great square in front of the cathedral is a

AN OLD WOMAN

jumble of gold and silver, embroidery, ribbons, muslin, and lace—a joyous feast of colour in the sun. The crowd moves slowly, forming into groups by the porch and round the stalls, with much gossip. The square and the neighbouring streets are bordered by stalls trading in fabrics and faiences, gingerbread, sweets, lotteries, cider, and fancy-work of all kinds. Young men and girls stop in couples to buy mirrors or coloured pins, surmounted with gold, that jingle, to fasten in their caps or in their bodices. Others gather round the lotteries, and watch with anxious eyes the wheel with the rod of metal that clicks all the way round on its spokes, and stops at a certain number. 'C'est vingt-deux qui gagne!' cries the proprietor. A pretty little peasant woman has won. She hesitates, wavering between a ball of golden glass and a vase painted with attractive flowers. The peasants laugh loudly.

There are all kinds of attractions and festivities at the *pardons*—hurdy-gurdies, swing-boats, voyages to the moon, on which you get your full and terrible money's worth of bumps and alarms; for not only are you jerked up hill and down dale in a car, but also, when you reach the moon, you are whirled round and round at a tremendous rate and

return backwards. There are side-shows in which are exhibited fat women, headless men, and bodiless girls, distorted thus by mirrors, the deception of which even we children saw through plainly. There are jugglers and snake-charmers. A cobra was fed on rabbits. We children haunted that tent at feeding-times, and used to watch with fascination the little dead bunnies disappearing, fur and all, afterwards noticing with glee the strange bumps they formed in the animal's smooth and shiny coils. How bloodthirsty children are at heart!

It is not always in large towns like Quimperlé that *pardons* are held. More often they are to be witnessed in the country, perhaps miles away from any town, whence the people flock on foot. There you see no grand cathedral, no magnificent basilicas and superb architecture, but some simple little gray church with moss-grown walls and trees growing thickly about it. The rustic charm of the *pardons* it is impossible to describe. Round you are immense woods and flowered prairies; in the woods the birds are singing; a mystic vapour of incense fills the air. Peasants gather round this modest house of prayer, which possesses nothing to attract the casual passer-by. The saints that

A PIG-MARKET

they have come to venerate have no speciality: they heal all troubles, assuage all griefs: they are infallible and all-powerful. Inside the church it is very dim and dark. Not a single candle is alight on the altar; only the lamp of the sanctuary shines out with red gleam like an ever-seeing eye. In the gray darkness of the choir the silent priests cross themselves. They look like ghosts of the faithful. The bells ring out in noisy peals, filling the air with vibrations. Over the fields the people hurry—girls in their smartest clothes, accompanied by their gallants; children brought by their mothers in their beautiful new suits to attend service and to have their faces bathed in the fountain, which cures them of all diseases, and makes them beautiful for ever; old men come to contemplate the joy of the young people, to be peaceful, and to ask forgiveness before leaving this world and the short life over which their own particular saint has watched. The bells peal so loudly that one is afraid they will crack under the efforts of the ringers. Still the people swarm over the fields and into the church, until at last the little edifice is full, and men and women and children are compelled to kneel outside on the hard earth; but the doors are opened, and those outside follow the service with great attention.

One must be a Breton born and cradled in the country in order to realize the important place that the *pardon* of his parish occupies in the peasant's mind. It is a religious festival of great significance: it is the day above all others on which he confesses his sins to God and receives absolution. Throughout his life his dearest and sweetest thoughts cling round this house of prayer and pardon.

Here it is generally that he betroths himself. He and the girl stroll home together when the sun has set, walking side by side over the fields, holding each other by the little finger, as is the Breton custom. A sweet serenity envelops the countryside; darkness falls; the stars appear. The man is shy; but the girl is at ease. When nearing home, to announce their arrival at the farm, they begin to sing a song that they have heard from the bards during the day. Other couples in the distance, hearing them, take up the refrain; and soon from all parts of the country swells up into the night air a kind of alternate song, in which the high trebles and the deep basses mingle harmoniously. As the darkness deepens the figures disappear and the sounds die away in the distance.

The Saturday before the first Sunday in July is

a fête-day in most towns. Pilgrims fill the towns, which are packed with stalls for the fair. There are sellers of cider and cakes, amulets, and rosaries. A statue of the Madonna surrounded by archangels against a background of blue is situated at the church door to receive the homage of faithful pilgrims. When night falls the door of the porch is flung open, and a long procession of girls, like an army of phantoms, advances, each penitent holding in her hand a lighted torch, slowly swinging her rosary and repeating a Latin prayer. The statue of the Virgin is solemnly carried out on the open square, where bonfires are lit and young folk dance to the accompaniment of the biniou.

In some places the dances are prolonged for three or four days. The Bretons like songs and dances and representations; they like the heavy pomp of pilgrimages; they believe in prayer, and never lose their respect for the Cross. They are a fine people, especially the men who live by the sea, sailors and fishermen—well-made, high-strung men, their faces bronzed and stained like sculptures out of old chestnut, with eyes of clear blue, full of the sadness of the sea. They have an air of robustness and vitality; but under their fierce exterior

they hide a great sweetness of nature. They are kind hosts; they are frank, brave, and chaste. They have, it is true, a weakness: on fair days—market-days especially—they abuse the terrible and brutalizing *vin du feu.* Then, the Bretons are not a very clean people. The interiors of the cottages are dignified, with great beds made of dark chestnut and long, narrow tables, stretching the whole length of the rooms, polished and bees-waxed until you can see your face mirrored on the surface; but pigs will repose on the stone floor, which waves up and down with indentations and deep holes. The more well-to-do Bretons have their clothes washed only once in six months. The soiled linen is kept above in an attic protected from the rats by a rope with broken bottles strung on it, on which the rats, as they come to gnaw the clothes, commit involuntary suicide.

The poorer families have better habits. They wash their few possessions regularly and out of doors in large pools constructed for the purpose, where hundreds of women congregate, kneeling on the flagstones around the pond, beating their linen energetically on boards, with a flat wooden tool, to economize soap. This I consider a far cleaner method than that of our British cottagers,

HOUSEHOLD DUTIES

who wash their clothes in their one living-room, inhaling impure steam.

In spite of the winds and the tempests which desolate it, the Bretons love their country. They live in liberty; they are their own masters. The past holds profound and tenacious root in the hearts of these men of granite, and the attachment to old beliefs is strong. The people still believe in miracles, in sorcery, and in the evil eye. The land, rich with memories of many kinds,—with its menhirs, its old cathedrals, its pilgrimages, its *pardons*—sleeps peacefully in this century of innovations. In Brittany everything seems to have been designed long ago. Wherever one goes one comes across a strange and ancient Druidical monument, menhirs, and dolmens of fabulous antiquity, an exquisite legend, a ruined château, ancient stone crosses, *calvaires,* and carvings. It is a country full of signs and meanings. The poetical superstitions and legends have been left intact in their primitive simplicity. Nowhere do you see finer peasantry; nowhere more dignity and nobility in the features of the men and women who work in the fields; nowhere such quaint houses and costumes; hardly anywhere more magnificent scenery. You have verdant islands, ancient forests,

villages nestling in the mountains, country as wild and beautiful as the moors of Scotland, fields and pasture-lands as highly cultivated as those of Lincolnshire.

Brittany is especially inspiring to the painter. You find villages in which the people still wear the national dress. Perhaps, however, the time is not far distant when new customs will arise and the old beliefs will be only a remembrance. Little by little the influence of modern times begins to show itself upon the language, the costume, and the poetic superstitions. The iron and undecorative hand of the twentieth century is closing down upon the country.

THE END

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